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THE TRESPASSER

BY

GILBERT PARKER

AUTHOR OF

THE TRANSLATION OF A SAVAGE, PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE
MRS. FALCHION, THE CHIEF FACTOR, ETC.

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TO

DOUGLAS ROBINSON, Esq.,

AND

FRANK A. HILTON, Esq.

My dear Douglas and Frank:

I feel sure that this dedication will give you as much pleasure as it does me. It will at least be evidence that I do not forget good days in your company here and there in the world. I take pleasure in linking your names; for you, who have never met, meet thus in the porch of a little house that I have built.

You, my dear Douglas, will find herein scenes, times, and things familiar to you; and you, my dear Frank, reflections of hours when we camped by an idle shore, or drew about the fire of winter nights, and told tales worth more than this, for they were of the future, and it is of the past.

Always sincerely yours,

GILBERT

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THE TRESPASSER.

CHAPTER I.

ONE IN SEARCH OF A KINGDOM.

WHY Gaston Belward left the wholesome North to journey afar, Jacques Brillon asked often in the brawling streets of New York, and oftener in the fog of London as they made ready to ride to Ridley Court. There was a railway station two miles from the Court, but Belward had had enough of railways. He had brought his own horse Saracen, and Jacques' broncho also, at foolish expense, across the sea, and at a hotel near Euston Station master and man mounted and set forth, having seen their worldly goods bestowed by staring porters, to go on by rail.

In murky London they attracted little notice; but when their hired guide left them at the outskirts, and they got away upon the highway towards the Court, cottagers stood gaping. For, outside the town there was no fog, and the fresh autumn air drew the people abroad.

"What is it makes 'em stare, Jacques?" said Belward, with a humorous sidelong glance.

Jacques looked seriously at the bright pommel of his master's saddle and the shining stirrups and spurs, dug a heel into the tender skin of his broncho, and replied:

"Too much silver all at once."

He tossed his curling black hair, showing up the gold rings in his ears, and flicked the red-and-gold tassels of his boots.

"You think that's it, eh?" rejoined Belward, as he tossed a shilling to a beggar.

"Maybe, too, your great Saracen to this tot of a broncho, and the *grand homme* to little Jacques Brillon!"

Jacques was tired and testy.

The other laid his whip softly on the half-breed's shoulder.

"See, my peacock: none of that. You're a spanking good servant, but you're in a country where it's knuckle down man to master; and what they do here you've got to do, or quit—go back to your peasoup and caribou! That's as true as God's in heaven, little Brillon. We're not on the buffalo trail now. You understand?"

Jacques nodded.

"Hadn't you better say it?"

The warning voice drew up the half-breed's face swiftly, and he replied:

"I am to do what you please."

"Exactly. You've been with me six years—ever since I turned Bear Eye's moccasins to the sun; and for that you swore you'd never leave me. Did it on a string of holy beads, didn't you, Frenchman?"

"I do it again."

He drew out a rosary, and disregarding Belward's outstretched hand, said:

"By the Mother of God, I will never leave you!"

There was a kind of wondering triumph in Belward's eyes, though he had at first shrunk from Jacques' action, and a puzzling smile came.

"Wherever I go, or whatever I do?"

"Whatever you do, or wherever you go."

He put the rosary to his lips, and made the sign of the cross.

His master looked at him curiously, intently. Here was a vain, naturally indolent half-breed, whose life had made for selfishness and independence, giving his neck willingly to a man's heel, serving with blind reverence, under a voluntary vow.

"Well, it's like this, Jacques," Belward said presently, "I want you, and I'm not going to say that you'll have a better time than you did in the North, or on the Slope; but if you'd rather be with me than not, you'll find that I'll interest you. There's a bond between us, anyway. You're half French, and I'm one-fourth French, and more. You're half Indian, and I'm one-fourth Indian—no more. That's enough!

So far, I haven't much advantage. But I'm one-half English—King's English, for there's been an offshoot of royalty in our family somewhere, and there's the royal difference. That's where I get my brains—and manners."

"Where did you get the other?" asked Jacques, shyly, almost furtively.

"Money?"

"Not money—the other!"

Belward spurred, and his horse sprang away viciously. A laugh came back on Jacques, who followed as hard as he could, and it gave him a feeling of awe. They were apart for a long time, then came together again, and rode for miles without a word. At last Belward, glancing at a sign-post before an inn-door, exclaimed at the legend—"The Whisk o' Barley,"—and drew rein. He regarded the place curiously for a minute. The landlord came out. Belward had some beer brought. A half-dozen rustics stood gaping, not far away. He touched his horse with a heel. Saracen sprang towards them, and they fell back alarmed. Belward now drank his beer quietly, and asked question after question of the landlord, sometimes waiting for an answer, sometimes not—a kind of cross-examination. Presently he dismounted.

As he stood questioning, chiefly about Ridley Court and its people, a coach showed on the hill, and came dashing down and past. He lifted his eyes

idly, though never before had he seen such a coach as swings away from Northumberland Avenue of a morning. He was not idle, however; but he had not come to England to show surprise at anything. As the coach passed his face lifted above the arm on the neck of the horse, keen, dark, strange. A man on the box-seat, attracted at first by the uncommon horses and their trappings, caught Belward's eyes. Not he alone, but Belward started then. Some vague intelligence moved the minds of both, and their attention was fixed till the coach rounded a corner and was gone.

The landlord was at Belward's elbow.

"The gentleman on the box-seat be from Ridley Court. That's Maister Ian Belward, sir."

Gaston Belward's eyes half closed, and a sombre look came, giving his face a handsome malice. He wound his fingers in his horse's mane, and put a foot in the stirrup.

"Who is 'Maister Ian'?"

"Maister Ian be Sir William's eldest, sir. On'y one that's left, sir. On'y three to start wi': and one be killed i' battle, and one had trouble wi' his faither and Maister Ian; and he went away and never was heard on again, sir. That's the end on *him*."

"Oh, that's the end on *him*, eh, landlord? And how long ago was that?"

"Becky, lass," called the landlord within the door, "wheniver was it Maister Robert turned his back on

the Court—iver so while ago? Eh, a fine lad that Maister Robert as iver I see!"

Fat laborious Becky hobbled out, holding an apple and a knife. She blinked at her husband, and then at the strangers.

"What be askin' o' the Court?" she said.

Her husband repeated the question.

She gathered her apron to her eyes with an unctuous sob:

"Doan't a' know when Maister Robert went! He comes i' the house 'ere and says: 'Becky, gie us a taste o' the red-top—and where 's Jock?' He was always thinkin' a deal o' my son Jock. 'Jock be gone,' I says, 'and I knows nowt o' his comin' back,'—meanin', I was, that day. 'Good for Jock!' says he, 'and I'm goin' too, Becky, and I knows nowt o' my comin' back.' 'Where be goin', Maister Robert?' I says. 'To hell, Becky,' says he, and he laughs. 'From hell to hell. I'm sick to my teeth o' one, I'll try t'other,' —a way like that speaks he."

Belward was impatient, and to hurry the story he made as if to start on. Becky, seeing, hastened.

"Dear a' dear! The red-top were afore him, and I tryin' to make what be come to him. He throws arm 'round me, smacks me on the cheek, and says he: 'Tell Jock to keep the mare, Becky.' Then he flings away, and never more comes back to the Court. And that day one year my Jock smacks me on the cheek,

and gets on the mare; and when I ask, 'Where be go-in'?' he says: 'For a hunt i' hell wi' Maister Robert, mither.' And from that day come back he never did, nor any word. There was trouble wi' the lad—wi' him and Maister Robert at the Court; but I never knowed nowt o' the truth. And it's seven-and-twenty years since Maister Robert went."

Gaston leaned over his horse's neck, and thrust a piece of silver into the woman's hands.

"Take that, Becky Lawson, and mop your eyes no more."

She gaped.

"How dost know my name was Becky Lawson? I havena been ca'd so these three-and-twenty years—not since a' married good man here, and put Jock's faither in 's grave yander."

"The devil told me," he answered, with a strange laugh, and, spurring, they were quickly out of sight.

They rode for a couple of miles without speaking. Jacques knew his master, and did not break the silence. Presently they came over a hill, and down upon a little bridge. Belward drew rein, and looked up the valley. About two miles beyond the roofs and turrets of the Court showed above the trees. A whimsical smile came to his lips.

"Brillon," he said, "I'm in sight of home."

The half-breed cocked his head. It was the first time that Belward had called him "Brillon"—he had

ever been "Jacques." This was to be a part of the new life. They were not now hunting elk, riding to "wipe out" a camp of Indians or navvies, dining the owner of a ranche or a deputation from a prairie constituency in search of a member, nor yet with a senator at Washington, who served tea with canvas-back duck and tooth-picks with dessert. Once before had Jacques seen this new manner—when Belward visited Parliament House at Ottawa, and was presented to some notable English people, visitors to Canada. It had come to these notable folk that Mr. Gaston Belward had relations at Ridley Court, and that of itself was enough to command courtesy. But presently, they who would be gracious for the family's sake, were gracious for the man's. He had that which compelled interest — a suggestive, personal, distinguished air. Jacques knew his master better than anyone else knew him; and yet he knew little, for Belward was of those who seem to give much confidence, and yet give little—never more than he wished.

"Yes, monsieur, in sight of home," Jacques replied, with a dry cadence.

"Say 'sir,' not 'monsieur,' Brillon; and from the time we enter the Court yonder, look every day and every hour as you did when the judge asked you who killed Tom Daly."

Jacques winced, but nodded his head.

Belward continued:

"What you hear me tell is what you can speak of; otherwise you are blind and dumb. You understand?"

Jacques' face was sombre, but he said quickly:

"Yes—sir."

He straightened himself on his horse, as if to put himself into discipline at once—as lead to the back of a racer.

Belward read the look. He drew his horse close up. Then he ran an arm over the other's shoulder.

"See here, Jacques. This is a game that's got to be played up to the hilt. A cat has nine lives, and most men have two. We have. Now listen. You never knew me mess things, did you? Well, I play for keeps in this; no monkeying. I've had the life of Ur of the Chaldees; now for Babylon. I've lodged with the barbarian; here are the roofs of ivory. I've had my day with my mother's people; *voilà!* for my father's. You heard what Becky Lawson said. My father was sick of it at twenty-five, and got out. We'll see what my father's son will do. . . . I'm going to say my say to you, and have done with it. As like as not there isn't another man that I'd have brought with me. You're all right. But I'm not going to rub noses. I stick when I do stick, but I know what's got to be done here; and I've told you. You'll not have the fun out of it that I will, but you won't have the worry. Now, we start fresh. I'm to be obeyed;

I'm Napoleon. I've got a devil, yet it needn't hurt you, and it won't. But if I make enemies here—and I'm sure to—let them look out. Give me your hand, Jacques; and don't you forget that there are two Gaston Belwards, and the one you have hunted and lived with is the one you want to remember when you get raw with the new one. For you'll hear no more slang like this from me, and you'll have to get used to lots of things."

Without waiting reply, Belward urged on his horse, and at last paused on the top of a hill, and waited for Jacques. It was now dusk, and the landscape showed soft, sleepy, and warm.

"It's all of a piece," Belward said to himself, glancing from the trim hedges, the small, perfectly-tilled fields and the smooth roads, to Ridley Court itself, where many lights were burning and gates opening and shutting. There was some affair on at the Court, and he smiled to think of his own appearance among the guests.

"It's a pity I haven't clothes with me, Brillon; they have a show going there."

He had dropped again into the new form of master and man. His voice was cadenced, gentlemanly.

Jacques pointed to his own saddle-bag.

"No, no, they are not the things needed. I want the evening-dress which cost that cool hundred dollars in New York."

Still Jacques was silent. He did not know whether, in his new position, he was expected to suggest. Belward understood, and it pleased him.

"If we had lost the track of a buck moose, or were nosing a cache of furs, you'd find a way, Brillon."

"*Voilà!*" said Jacques; "then, why not wear the buckskin vest, the red-silk sash, and the boots like these?"—tapping his own patent-leathers. "You look a grand seigneur so."

"But I am here to look an English gentleman, not a grand seigneur, nor a company's trader on a break. —Never mind, the thing will wait till we stand in my ancestral halls," he added, with a dry laugh.

They neared the Court. The village church was close by the Court-wall. It drew Belward's attention. One by one lights were springing up in it. It was a Friday evening, and the choir were come to practice. They saw buxom village girls stroll in, followed by the organist, one or two young men and a handful of boys. Presently the horsemen were seen, and a staring group gathered at the church-door. An idea came to Belward.

"Kings used to make pilgrimages before they took their crowns, why shouldn't I?" he said half-jestingly.

Most men placed similarly would have been so engaged with the main event that they had never thought of this other. But Belward was not excited. He was moving deliberately, prepared for every situation. He

had a great game in hand, and he had no fear of his ability to play it. He suddenly stopped his horse, and threw the bridle to Jacques, saying:

"I'll be back directly, Brillon."

He entered the churchyard, and passed to the door. As he came the group under the crumbling arch fell back, and at the call of the organist went to the chancel. Belward came slowly up the aisle, and paused about the middle. Something in the scene gave him a new sensation. The church was old, dilapidated; but the timbered roof, the Norman and Early English arches incongruously side by side, with patches of ancient distemper and paintings, and, more than all, the marble figures on the tombs, with hands folded so foolishly,—yet impressively too,—brought him up with a quick throb of the heart. It was his first real contact with England; for he had not seen London, save at Euston Station and in the north-west district. But here he was in touch with his heritage. He rested his hand upon a tomb beside him, and looked around slowly.

The choir began the psalm for the following Sunday. At first he did not listen; but presently the organist was heard alone, and then the choir afterwards sang:

"Woe is me, that I am constrained to dwell with Mesech:
And to have my habitation among the tents of Kedar."

Simple, dusty, ancient church, thick with effigies and tombs; with inscriptions upon pillars to virgins departed this life; and tablets telling of gentlemen gone from great parochial virtues: it wakened in Belward's brain a fresh conception of the life he was about to live—he did not doubt that he would live it. He would not think of himself as inacceptable to old Sir William Belward. He glanced to the tomb under his hand. There was enough daylight yet to see the inscription on the marble. Besides, a single candle was burning just over his head. He stooped and read:

Sacred to the Memory
OF
SIR GASTON ROBERT BELWARD, BART.,
OF RIDLEY COURT, IN THIS PARISH OF GASTONBURY,
WHO,
AT THE AGE OF ONE AND FIFTY YEARS,
AFTER A LIFE OF DISTINGUISHED SERVICE FOR HIS KING
AND COUNTRY,
AND GRAVE AND CONSTANT CARE OF THOSE EXALTED WORKS
WHICH BECOME A GENTLEMAN OF ENGLAND;
MOST NOTABLE FOR HIS LOVE OF ARTS AND LETTERS;
SENSIBLE IN ALL GRACES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS;
GIFTED WITH SINGULAR VIRTUES AND INTELLECTS;
AND
DELIGHTING AS MUCH IN THE JOYS OF PEACE
AS IN THE HEAVY DUTIES OF WAR:
WAS SLAIN BY THE SIDE OF HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS,
THE BELOVED AND ILLUSTRIOUS PRINCE RUPERT,
AT THE BATTLE OF NASEBY,
IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD MDCXLV.
"*A Sojourner as all my Fathers were.*"

"'Gaston Robert Belward'!"

He read the name over and over, his fingers tracing the letters.

His first glance at the recumbent figure had been hasty. Now, however, he leaned over and examined it. It lay, hands folded, in the dress of Prince Rupert's cavaliers, a sword at side, and great spurs laid beside the heels.

"'Gaston Robert Belward'!"

As this other Gaston Robert Belward looked at the image of his dead ancestor, a wild thought came: Had he himself not fought with Prince Rupert? Was he not looking at himself in stone? Was he not here to show England how a knight of Charles' time would look upon the life of the Victorian age? Would not this still cold Gaston be as strange at Ridley Court as himself fresh from tightening a cinch on the belly of a broncho? Would he not ride from where he had been sojourning as much a stranger in his England as himself?

For a moment the idea possessed him. *He was Sir Gaston Robert Belward, Baronet.* He remembered now how, at Prince Rupert's side, he had sped on after Ireton's horse, cutting down Roundheads as he passed, on and on, mad with conquest, yet wondering that Rupert kept so long in pursuit while Charles was in danger with Cromwell: how, as the word came to wheel back, a shot tore away the pommel of his

saddle; then another, and another, and with a sharp twinge in his neck he fell from his horse. He remembered how he raised himself on his arm and shouted "God save the King!" How he loosed his scarf and staunched the blood at his neck, then fell back into a whirring silence, from which he was roused by feeling himself in strong arms, and hearing a voice say, "Courage, Gaston." Then came the distant, very distant, thud of hoofs, and he fell asleep; and memory was done!

He stood for a moment oblivious to everything: the evening bird fluttering among the rafters, the song of the nightingale without, the sighing wind in the tower entry, the rustics in the doorway, the group in the choir.

Presently he became conscious of the words sung:

"A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone;
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

"Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day."

He was himself again in an instant. He had been in a kind of dream. It seemed a long time since he had entered the church—in reality but a few moments. He caught his moustache in his fingers, and turned on his heel with a musing smile. His spurs

clinked as he went down the aisle; and, involuntarily, he tapped a boot-leg with his riding-whip. The singing ceased. His spurs made the only sound. The rustics at the door fell back before him. He had to go up three steps to reach the threshold. As he stood on the top one he paused and turned round.

So, this was home: this church more so even than the Court hard by. Here his ancestors—for how long he did not know, probably since the time of Edward III.—idled time away in the dust; here Gaston Belward had been sleeping in effigy since Naseby Field. A romantic light came into his face. Again, why not? Even in the Hudson's Bay country and in the Rocky Mountains, he had been called, "Tivi: The Man of the Other." He had been counted the greatest of Medicine Men—one of the Race: the people of the Pole, who lived in a pleasant land, gifted as none others of the race of men. Not an hour before Jacques had asked him where he got "the other." No man can live in the North for any time without getting the strain of its mystery and romance in him. Gaston waved his hand to the tomb, and said half-believingly:

"Gaston Robert Belward, come again to your kingdom!"

He turned to go out, and faced the rector of the parish,—a bent, benign-looking man,—who gazed at him astonished. He had heard the strange speech.

His grave eyes rested on the stalwart stranger with courteous inquiry. Gaston knew who it was. Over his left brow there was a scar. He had heard of that scar before. When the venerable Archdeacon Varcoe was tutor to Ian and Robert Belward, Ian, in a fit of anger, had thrown a stick at his brother. It had struck the clergyman, leaving a scar.

Gaston now raised his hat. As he passed, the rector looked after him, puzzled; the words he had heard addressed to the effigy returning. His eyes followed the young man to the gate, and presently, with a quick lifting of the shoulders, he said:

"Robert Belward!" Then added: "Impossible! But he is a Belward!"

He saw Gaston mount, then entered and went slowly up the aisle. He paused beside the tomb of that other Belward. His wrinkled hand rested on it.

"That is it," he said at last. "He is like the picture of this Sir Gaston. Strange!"

He sighed, and unconsciously touched the scar on his brow. His dealings with the Belwards had not been all joy. Begun with youthful pride and affectionate interest, they had gone on into vexation, sorrow, failure, and shame. While Gaston was riding into his kingdom, Lionel Henry Varcoe was thinking how poor his life had been where he had meant it to be useful.

As he stood musing and listening to the music of

the choir, a girl came softly up the aisle, and touched him on the arm.

"Grandfather, dear," she said, "aren't you going to the Court? You have not been there to dine for so long!"

He fondled the hand on his arm.

"My dearest, they have not asked me for a long time."

"But why not to-night? I have laid out everything nicely for you: your new gaiters, and your D. C. L. coat with the pretty buttons and cord."

"How can I leave you, my dear? And they do not ask you!"

The voice tried for playfulness, but the eyes had a disturbed look.

"Me? Oh! they never ask me to dinner—you know that. Tea and formal visits are enough for Lady Belward, and almost too much for me. There is yet time to dress. Oh! say you will go. I want you to be friendly with them."

The old man shook his head.

"I do not care to leave you, my dearest."

"Foolish old fatherkins! Who would carry me off?—'Nobody, no, not I, nobody cares for me.'"

Suddenly a new look shot up in her face.

"Did you see that singular handsome man who came from the church—like someone out of an old painting? Not that his dress was so strange; but

there was something in his face—something that you would expect to find in—in a Garibaldi. Silly, am I not? Did you see him?"

He looked at her gravely.

"My dear," he said at last, "I think I will go after all, though I shall be a little late."

"A sensible grandfather! Come quickly, dear."

He paused again.

"But I fear I sent a note declining."

"Ah, no, you did not. It has been lying on your table for two days."

"Dear me—dear me! I am getting very old!"

They passed out of the church. Presently, as they hurried to the rectory near by, the girl said:

"But you haven't answered. Did you see the stranger? Do you know who he is?"

The rector turned, and pointed to the gate of Ridley Court. Gaston and Brillon were just entering.

"Alice, dear," he said, in a vague, half-troubled way, "the man is a Belward, I think."

"Why, of course!" the girl replied with a flash of excitement. "But so dark, strange, and foreign-looking! What Belward is he?"

"I do not know yet, my dear."

"I shall be up when you come back. But mind, don't leave just after dinner. Stay and talk; you must tell me everything that's said and done—and about the stranger!"

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH HE CLAIMS HIS OWN.

MEANWHILE, without a word, Gaston had mounted, ridden to the castle, and passed through the open gates into the courtyard. Inside he paused. In the main building many lights were burning. There came a rattle of wheels behind him, and he shifted to let a carriage pass. Through the window of the brougham he could see the shimmer of satin, lace, and soft white fur, and he had an instant's glance of a pretty face.

The carriage drew up to the steps, and presently three ladies and a brusque gentleman passed into the hall-way, admitted by powdered footmen. The incident had a manner, an air, which struck Gaston, he knew not why. Perhaps it was the easy finesse of ceremonial. He looked at Brillon. He had seen him sit arms folded like that, looking from the top of a bluff down on an Indian village or a herd of buffaloes. There was wonder, but no shyness or agitation, on his face; rather the naïve, naked look of a child. Belward laughed.

"Come, Brillon; we are at home."

He rode up to the steps, Jacques following. A footman appeared and stared. Gaston looked down on him neutrally, and dismounted. Jacques did the same. The footman still stared. Another appeared behind. Gaston eyed the puzzled servant calmly.

"Why don't you call a groom?" he presently said. There was a cold gleam in his eye.

The footman shrank.

"Oh, yessir, yessir," he said confusedly, and signalled.

The other footman came down, and made as if to take the bridle. Gaston waved him back. None too soon, for the horse lunged at him.

"A rub down, a pint of beer, and water and feed in an hour, and I'll come to see him myself late to-night."

Jacques had loosened the saddle-bags and taken them off. Gaston spoke to the horse, patted his neck, and gave him to the groom. Then he went up the steps, followed by Jacques. He turned at the door to see the groom leading both horses off, eyeing Saracen suspiciously. He laughed noiselessly.

"Saracen 'll teach him things," he said. "I might warn him, but it's best for the horses to make their own impressions."

"What name, sir?" said a footman.

"You are——?"

"Falby, sir."

"Falby, look after my man Brillon here, and take me to Sir William."

"What name, sir?"

Gaston, as if with sudden thought, stepped into the light of the candles, and said in a low voice:

"Falby, don't you know me?"

The footman turned a little pale, as his eyes, in spite of themselves, clung to Gaston's. A kind of fright came, and then they steadied.

"Oh yes, sir," he said mechanically.

"Where have you seen me?"

"In the picture on the wall, sir."

"Whose picture, Falby?"

"Sir Gaston Belward, sir."

A smile lurked at the corners of Gaston's mouth.

"Gaston Belward. Very well, then you know what to say to Sir William. Show me into the library."

"Or the justices' room, sir?"

"The justices' room will do."

Gaston wondered what the justices' room was. A moment after he stood in it, and the dazed Falby had gone, trying vainly to reconcile the picture on the wall, which, now that he could think, he knew was very old, with this strange man who had sent a curious cold shiver through him. But, anyhow, he was a Belward, that was certain: voice, face, manner

showed it. But with something like no Belward he had ever seen.

Left to himself, Gaston looked round on a large, severe room. Its use dawned on him. This was part of the life: Sir William was a Justice of the Peace. But why had he been brought here? Why not to the library, as himself had suggested? There would be some awkward hours for Falby in the future. Gaston had as winning a smile, as sweet a manner, as anyone in the world, so long as a straight game was on; but to cross his will with the other!—he had been too long a power in that wild country where his father had also been a power! He did not quite know how long he waited, for he was busy with plans as to his career at Ridley Court. He was roused at last by Falby's entrance. A keen, cold look shot from under his straight brows.

"Well?" he said.

"Will you step into the library, sir? Sir William will see you there."

Falby tried to avoid his look, but his eyes were compelled, and Gaston said:

"Falby, you will always hate to enter this room."

Falby was agitated.

"I hope not, sir."

"But you will, Falby, unless——"

"Yessir?"

"Unless you are both the serpent and the dove Falby."

"Yessir."

As they entered the hall, Brillon with the saddle-bags was being taken in charge, and Gaston saw what a strange figure he looked beside the other servants and in these fine surroundings. He could not think that himself was so bizarre. Nor was he. But he looked unusual; as one of high civilisation might, through long absence in primitive countries, return in uncommon clothing, and with a manner of distinguished strangeness: the barbaric to protect the refined, as one has seen a bush of firs set to shelter a wheat-field from a sea-wind, or a windmill water cunningly-begotten flowers.

As he went through the hall other visitors were entering. They passed him, making for the staircase. Ladies with the grand air looked at him curiously, and two girls glanced shyly from the jingling spurs and tasselled boots to his rare face.

One of the ladies suddenly gave a little gasping cry, and catching the arm of her companion, said:

"Reiné! how like Robert Belward! Who—who is he?"

The other coolly put up her *pince-nez*. She caught Gaston's profile and the turn of his shoulder.

"Yes, like, Sophie; but Robert never had such a back, nor anything like the face."

She spoke with no attempt to modulate her voice, and it carried distinctly to Gaston. He turned and glanced at them.

"He's a Belward, certainly, but like what one I don't know; and terribly eccentric, my dear! Did you see the boots and the sash? Why, bless me, if you are not shaking! Don't be silly—shivering at the thought of Robert Belward after all these years!"

So saying, Mrs. Warren Gasgoyne tapped Lady Dargan on the arm, and then turned sharply to see if her daughters had been listening. She saw that they had; and though herself and not her sister was to blame, she said:

"Sophie, you are very indiscreet! If you had daughters of your own, you would probably be more careful—though Heaven only knows, for you were always difficult!"

With this they vanished up the staircase, Mrs. Gasgoyne's daughters, Delia and Agatha, smiling at each other and whispering of Gaston.

Meanwhile the seeker after a kingdom was shown into Sir William Belward's study. No one was there. He walked to the mantelpiece, and, leaning his arm on it, looked round. Directly in front of him on the wall was the picture of a lady in middle-life, sitting in an arbour. A crutch lay against one arm of her chair, and her left hand leaned on an ebony silver-topped cane. There was something painful, haunt-

ing, in the face—a weirdness in the whole picture. The face was looking into the sunlight, but the effect was rather of moonlight—distant, mournful. He was fascinated; why, he could not tell. Art to him was an unknown book, but he had the instinct, and he was quick to feel. This picture struck him as being out of harmony with everything else in the room. Yet it had a strange compelling charm.

Presently he started forward with an exclamation. Now he understood the vague, eerie influence. Looking out from behind the foliage was a face, so dim that one moment it seemed not to be there, and then suddenly to flash in—as a picture from Beyond sails, lightning-like, across the filmy eyes of the dying. It was the face of a youth, elf-like, unreal, yet he saw his father's features in it.

He rubbed his eyes and looked again. It seemed very dim. Indeed, so delicately, vaguely, had the work been done that only eyes like Gaston's, trained to observe, with the sight of a hawk and a sense of the mysterious, could have seen so quickly or so distinctly. He drew slowly back to the mantel again, and mused. What did it mean? He was sure that the woman was his grandmother.

At that moment the door opened, and an alert, white-haired man stepped in quickly, and stopped in the centre of the room, looking at his visitor. His deep, keen eyes gazed out with an intensity that

might almost be fierceness, and the fingers of his fine hands opened and shut nervously. Though of no great stature, he had singular dignity. He was in evening-dress, and as he raised a hand to his chin quickly, as if in surprise or perplexity, Gaston noticed that he wore a large seal-ring. It is singular that while he was engaged with his great event, he was also thinking what an air of authority the ring gave.

For a moment the two men stood at gaze without speaking, though Gaston stepped forward respectfully. A bewildered, almost shrinking look came into Sir William's eyes, as the other stood full in the light of the candles.

Presently the old man spoke. In spite of conventional smoothness, his voice had the ring of distance, which comes from having lived through and above painful things.

"My servant announced you as Sir Gaston Belward. There is some mistake?"

"There is a mistake," was the slow reply. "I did not give my name as Sir Gaston Belward. That was Falby's conclusion, sir. But I am Gaston Robert Belward, just the same."

Sir William was dazed, puzzled. He presently made a quick gesture, as if driving away some foolish thought, and, motioning to a chair, said:

"Will you be seated?"

They both sat, Sir William by his writing-table. His look was now steady and penetrating, but he met one just as firm.

"You are—Gaston Robert Belward? May I ask for further information?"

There was furtive humour playing at Gaston's mouth. The old man's manner had been so unlike anything he had ever met, save, to an extent, in his father, that it interested him. He replied, with keen distinctness:

"You mean, why I have come—home?"

Sir William's fingers trembled on a paper-knife.

"Are you—at home?"

"I have come home to ask for my heritage—with interest compounded, sir."

Sir William was now very pale. He got to his feet, came to the young man, peered into his face, then drew back to the table and steadied himself against it. Gaston rose also: his instinct of courtesy was acute—absurdly civilised—that is, primitive. He waited.

"You are Robert's son?"

"Robert Belward was my father."

"Your father is dead?"

"Twelve years ago."

Sir William sank back in his chair. His thin fingers ran back and forth along his lips. Presently he took out his handkerchief and coughed into it nerv-

ously. His lips trembled. With a preoccupied air he arranged a handful of papers on the table.

"Why did you not come before?" he said at last, in a low, mechanical voice.

"It was better for a man than a boy to come."

"May I ask why?"

"A boy doesn't always see a situation—gives up too soon—throws away his rights. My father was a boy!"

"He was twenty-five when he went away."

"I am fifty!"

Sir William looked up sharply, perplexed.

"Fifty?"

"He only knew this life: I know the world!"

"What world?"

"The great North, the South, the seas at four corners of the earth."

Sir William glanced at the top-boots, the peeping sash, the strong, bronzed face.

"Who was your mother?" he asked abruptly.

"A woman of France."

The baronet made a gesture of impatience, and looked searchingly at the young man.

All at once Gaston shot his bolt, to have it over.

"She had Indian blood also."

He stretched himself to his full height, easily, broadly, with a touch of defiance, and leaned an arm against the mantel, awaiting Sir William's reply.

The old man shrank, then said coldly:

"Have you the marriage-certificate?"

Gaston drew some papers from his pockets.

"Here, sir, with a letter from my father, and one from the Hudson's Bay Company."

His grandfather took them. With an effort he steadied himself, then opened and read them one by one, his son's brief letter last—it was merely a calm farewell, with a request that justice should be done his son.

At that moment Falby entered and said:

"Her ladyship's compliments, and all the guests have arrived, sir."

"My compliments to her ladyship, and ask her to give me five minutes yet, Falby."

Turning to his grandson, there seemed to be a moment's hesitation, then he reached out his hand.

"You have brought your luggage?—Will you care to dine with us?"

Gaston took the cold outstretched fingers.

"Only my saddle-bag, and I have no evening-dress with me, else I should be glad."

There was another glance up and down the athletic figure, a half-apprehensive smile as the baronet thought of his wife, and then he said:

"We must see if anything can be done."

He pulled a bell-cord. A servant appeared.

"Ask the housekeeper to come for a moment, please."

Neither spoke till the housekeeper appeared.

"Hovey," he said to the grim woman, "give Mr. Gaston the room in the north tower. Then, from the press in the same room lay out the evening-dress which you will find there. . . . They were your father's," he added, turning to the young man. "It was my wife's wish to keep them. Have they been aired lately, Hovey?"

"Some days ago, sir."

"That will do." The housekeeper left, agitated. "You will probably be in time for the fish," he added, as he bowed to Robert.

"If the clothes do not fit, sir?"

"Your father was about your height and nearly as large, and fashions have not changed much!"

A few moments afterwards Gaston was in the room which his father had occupied twenty-seven years before. The taciturn housekeeper, eying him excitedly the while, put out the clothes. He did not say anything till she was about to go. Then:

"Hovey, were you here in my father's time?"

"I was under-parlourmaid, sir," she said.

"And you are housekeeper now—good!"

The face of the woman crimsoned, hiding her dour wrinkles. She turned away her head.

"I'd have given my right hand if he hadn't gone, sir."

Gaston whistled softly, then:

"So would he, I fancy, before he died. But I shall not go, so you will not need to risk a finger for me. I am going to stay, Hovey. Good-night. Look after Brillon, please."

He held out his hand. Her fingers twitched in his, then grasped them nervously.

"Yes, sir. Good-night, sir. It's—it's like him comin' back, sir."

Then she suddenly turned and hurried from the room, a blunt figure to whom emotion was not graceful.

"H'm!" said Gaston, as he shut the door. "Parlourmaid then, eh? History at every turn! *Vôici le sabre de mon père!*"

CHAPTER III.

HE TELLS THE STORY OF HIS LIFE.

GASTON BELWARD was not sentimental: that belongs to the middle-class Englishman's ideal of civilisation. But he had a civilisation akin to the highest; incongruous, therefore, to the general as the sympathy between the United States and Russia. The highest civilisation can be independent. The English aristocrat is at home in the lodge of a Sioux chief or the bamboo-hut of a Fijian, and makes brothers of "savages," when those other formal folk, who spend their lives in keeping their dignity, would be lofty and superior.

When Gaston looked at his father's clothes and turned them over, he had a twinge of honest emotion; but his mind was on the dinner and his heritage, and he only said, as he frowned at the tightness of the waistband:

"Never mind, we'll make 'em pay, shot and wadding, for what you lost, Robert Belward; and wherever you are, I hope you'll see it!"

In twelve minutes from the time he entered the bedroom he was ready. He pulled the bell-cord, and

then passed out. A servant met him on the stairs, and in another minute he was inside the dining-room. Sir William's eyes flashed up. There was smouldering excitement in his face, but one could not have guessed at anything unusual. A seat had been placed for Gaston beside him. The situation was singular and trying. It would have been easier if he had merely come into the drawing-room after dinner. This was in Sir William's mind when he asked him to dine; but it was as it was. Gaston's alert glance found the empty seat. He was about to make towards it, but he caught Sir William's eye and saw it signal him to the end of the table near him. His brain was working with celerity and clearness. He now saw the woman whose portrait had so fascinated him in the library. As his eyes fastened on her here, he almost fancied he could see the boy's—his father's—face looking over her shoulder.

He instantly went to her, and said :

"I am sorry to be late."

His first impulse had been to offer his hand, as, naturally, he would have done in "barbaric" lands, but the instinct of this other civilisation was at work in him. He might have been a polite casual guest, and not a grandson, bringing the remembrance, the culmination of twenty-seven years' tragedy into a home; she might have been a hostess with whom he wished to be on terms : that was all.

If the situation was trying for him, it was painful for her. She had had only a whispered announcement before Sir William led the way to dinner. Yet she was now all her husband had been, and more. Repression had been her practice for unnumbered years, and the only heralds of her feelings were the restless wells of her dark eyes: the physical and mental misery she had endured lay hid under the pale composure of her face. She was now brought suddenly before the composite image of her past. Yet she merely lifted a slender hand with long, fine fingers, which, as they clasped his, all at once trembled, and then pressed them hotly, nervously. To his surprise, it sent a twinge of colour to his cheek.

"It was good of you to come down after such a journey," she said. Nothing more.

Then he passed on, and sat down to Sir William's courteous gesture. The situation had its difficulties for the guests—perfect guests as they were. Everyone was aware of a dramatic incident, for which there had been no preparation save Sir William's remark that a grandson had arrived from the North Pole or thereabouts; and to continue conversation and appear "casual" put their resources to some test. But they stood it well, though their eyes were busy, and the talk was cheerfully mechanical. So occupied were they with Gaston's entrance, that they did not know how near Lady Dargan came to fainting.

At the button-hole of the coat worn by Gaston hung a tiny piece of red ribbon which she had drawn from her sleeve on the terrace twenty-seven years ago, and tied there with the words:

"Do you think you will wear it till we meet again?"

And the man had replied:

"You'll not see me without it, pretty girl—pretty girl!"

A woman is not so unaccountable after all. She has more imagination than a man; she has not many resources to console her for disappointments, and she prizes to her last hour the swift moments when wonderful things seemed possible. That man is foolish who shows himself jealous of a woman's memories or tokens—those guarantees of her womanliness.

When Lady Dargan saw the ribbon, which Gaston in his hurry had not disturbed, tied exactly as she had tied it, a weird feeling came to her, and she felt choking. But her sister's eyes were on her, and Mrs. Gasgoyne's voice came across the table clearly:

"Sophie, what were Fred Bideford's colours at Sandown? You always remember that kind of thing."

The warning was sufficient. Lady Dargan could make no effort of memory, but she replied without hesitation—or conscience:

"Yellow and brown."

"There," said Mrs. Gasgoyne, "we are both wrong, Captain Maudsley! Sophie never makes a mistake."

Maudsley assented politely, but, stealing a look at Lady Dargan, wondered what the little by-play meant. Gaston was between Sir William and Mrs. Gasgoyne. He declined soup and fish, which had just been served, because he wished for time to get his bearings. He glanced at the menu as if idly interested, conscious that he was under observation. He felt that he had, somehow, the situation in his hands. Everything had gone well, and he knew that his part had been played with some aplomb—natural, instinctive. Unlike most large men, he had a mind always alert, not requiring the inspiration of unusual moments. What struck him most forcibly now was the tasteful courtesy which had made his entrance easy. He instinctively compared it to the courtesy in the lodge of an Indian chief, or of a Hudson's Bay factor who has not seen the outer world for half a century. It was so different, and yet it was much the same. He had seen a missionary, a lay-reader, come intoxicated into a council of chiefs. The chiefs did not show that they knew his condition till he forced them to do so. Then two of the young men rose, suddenly pinned him in their arms, carried him out, and tied him in a lodge. The next morning they sent him out of their country. Gaston was no philosopher, but he could "place" a thing when he saw it: which is a kind of genius.

Presently Sir William said quietly:

"Mrs. Gasgoyne, you knew Robert well; his son ought to know you."

Gaston turned to Mrs. Gasgoyne, and said in his father's manner as much as possible, for now his mind ran back to how his father talked and acted, forming a standard for him:

"My father once told me a tale of the Keithley Hunt—something 'away up,' as they say in the West, —and a Mrs. Warren Gasgoyne was in it."

He made an instant friend of Mrs. Gasgoyne—made her so purposely. This was one of the few things from his father's talks upon his past life. He remembered the story because it was interesting, the name because it had a sound.

She flushed with pleasure. That story of the Hunt was one of her sweetest recollections. For her bravery then she had been voted by the field "a good fellow," and an admiral present declared that she had a head "as long as the maintop bow-line." She loved admiration, though she had no foolish sentiment; she called men silly creatures, and yet would go on her knees across country to do a deserving man-friend a service. She was fifty and over, yet she had the springing heart of a girl—mostly hid behind a brusque manner and a blunt, kindly tongue.

"Your father could always tell a good story," she said.

"He told me one of you: what about telling me one of him?"

Adaptable, he had at once fallen in with her direct speech, the more so because it was his natural way; any other ways were "games," as he himself said.

She flashed a glance at her sister, and smiled half-ironically.

"I could tell you plenty," she said softly. "He was a startling fellow, and went far sometimes; but you look as if you could go farther."

Gaston helped himself to an entrée, wondering whether a knife was used with sweetbreads.

"How far could he go?" he asked.

"In the hunting-field with anybody, with women endlessly, with meanness like a snail, and when his blood was up, to the most nonsensical place you can think of."

Forks only for sweetbreads! Gaston picked one up.

"He went there."

"Who told you?"

"I came from there."

"Where is it?"

"A few hundred miles from the Arctic circle."

"Oh! I didn't think it was *that* climate!"

"It never is till you arrive. You are always out in the cold there."

"That sounds American."

"Every man is a sinner one way or another."

"You are very clever—cleverer than your father ever was!"

"I hope so."

"Why?"

"He went—there! I've come—from there!"

"And you think you will stay — never go back?"

"He was 'out of it' for twenty years, and died. If I am 'in it' for that long, I shall have had enough."

Their eyes met. The woman looked at him steadily.

"You won't be," she replied, this time seriously, and in a very low voice.

"No?—why?"

"Because you will tire of it all—though you've started very well!"

She then answered a question of Captain Maudsley's, and turned again to Gaston.

"What will make me tire of it?" he inquired.

She sipped her champagne musingly.

"Oh, what is in you deeper than all this; with the help of some woman probably."

She looked at him searchingly, then added:

"You seem strangely like and yet unlike your father to-night."

"I am wearing his clothes," he said.

She had plenty of nerve, but this startled her. She shrank a little: it seemed uncanny. Now she remembered that ribbon in the button-hole!

"Poor Sophie!" she thought. "And this one will make greater mischief here." Then, aloud to him: "Your father was a good fellow, but he did wild things."

"I do not see the connection," he answered. "I am not a good man, and I shall do wilder things—is that it?"

"You will do mad things," she replied hardly above a whisper, and talked once more with Captain Maudsley.

Gaston now turned to his grandfather, who had heard a sentence here and there, and felt that the young man carried off the situation well enough. He then began to talk in a general way about Gaston's voyage, of the Hudson's Bay Company, and expeditions to the Arctic, drawing Lady Dargan into the conversation.

Whatever might be said of Sir William Belward he was an excellent host. He had a cool, unmalicious wit, but that man was unwise who offered himself to its severity. To-night he surpassed himself in suggestive talk, until, all at once, seeing Lady Dargan's eyes fixed on Gaston, he went silent, sitting back in his chair abstracted. Soon, however, a warning glance from his wife brought him back and saved

Lady Dargan from collapse; for it seemed impossible to talk alone to this ghost of her past.

At this moment Gaston heard a voice near:

"As like as if he'd stepped out of the picture, if it weren't for the clothes. A Gaston too!"

The speaker was Lord Dargan. He was talking to Archdeacon Varcoe.

Gaston followed Lord Dargan's glance to the portrait of that Sir Gaston Belward whose effigy he had seen. He found himself in form, feature, expression; the bold vigilance of eye, the primitive activity of shoulder, the small firm foot, the nervous power of the hand. The eyes seemed looking at him. He answered to the look. There was in him the romantic strain, and something more! In the remote parts of his being there was the capacity for the phenomenal, the strange. Once again, as in the church, he saw the field of Naseby, King Charles, Ireton's men, Cromwell and his Ironsides, Prince Rupert and the swarming rush of cavalry, and the end of it all!—Had it been a tale of his father's at camp-fires? Had he read it somewhere? He felt his blood thump in his veins!

Another half-hour, wherein he was learning every minute, nothing escaping him, everything interesting him,—his grandfather and Mrs. Gasgoyne especially,—then the ladies retired slowly with their crippled hostess, who gave Gaston, as she rose, a look almost painfully intense. It haunted him.

Now Gaston had his chance. He had no fear of what he could do with men: he had measured himself a few times with English gentlemen as he travelled, and he knew where his power lay—not in making himself agreeable, but in imposing his personality.

The guests were not soon to forget the talk of that hour. It played into Gaston's hands. He pretended to nothing; he confessed ignorance here and there with great simplicity; but he had the gift of reducing things, as it were, to their original elements. He cut away to the core of a matter, and having simple, fixed ideas, he was able to focus the talk, which had begun with hunting stories, and ended with the morality of duelling. Gaston's hunting stories had made them breathless, his views upon duelling did not free their lungs.

There were sentimentalists present; others who, because it had become etiquette not to cross swords, thought it indecent. Archdeacon Varcoe would not be drawn into discussion, but sipped his wine, listened, and watched Gaston.

The young man measured his grandfather's mind, and he drove home his points mercilessly.

Captain Maudsley said something about "romantic murder."

"That's the trouble," Gaston said. "I don't know who killed duelling in England, but behind it must have been a woman or a shopkeeper: sentimentalism,

timidity; dead romance. What is patriotism but romance?—ideals is what they call it somewhere. I've lived in a land full of hard work and dangers, but also full of romance. What is the result?—A people off there that you pity, and who don't need pity. Romance? See: you only get square justice out of a wise autocrat, not out of your 'twelve true men'; and duelling is the last decent relic of autocracy. Suppose the wronged man does get killed; that is all right: it wasn't merely blood he was after, but the right to hit a man in the eye for a wrong done. What is all this hullaballoo about saving human life? There's as much interest—and duty—in dying as living, if you go the way your conscience tells you."

A couple of hours later, Gaston, after having seen to his horse, stood alone in the drawing-room with his grandfather and grandmother. As yet Lady Belward had spoken not half a dozen words to him. Sir William presently said to him:

"Are you too tired to join us in the library?"

"I'm as fresh as paint, sir," was the reply.

Lady Belward turned without a word, and slowly passed from the room. Gaston's eyes followed the crippled figure, which yet had a rare dignity. He had a sudden impulse. He stepped to her and said with an almost boyish simplicity:

"You are very tired; let me carry you—grandmother!"

He could hear Sir William gasp a little as he laid a quick warm hand on hers that held the cane. She looked at him gravely, sadly, and then said:

"I will take your arm, if you please."

He took the cane, and she put a hand towards him. He ran his strong arm round her waist with a little humouring laugh, her hand rested on his shoulder, and he timed his step to hers. Sir William was in an eddy of wonder—a strong head was "mazed." He had looked for a different reception of this uncommon kinsman. How quickly had the new-comer conquered himself! And yet he had a slight strangeness of accent—not American, but something which seemed unusual. He did not reckon with a voice which, under cover of easy deliberation, had a convincing quality; with a manner of old-fashioned courtesy and stateliness. As Mrs. Warren Gasgoyne had said to the rector, whose eyes had followed Gaston everywhere in the drawing-room:

"My dear archdeacon, where did he get it? Why, he has lived most of his life with savages!"

"Vandyke might have painted the man," Lord Dargan had added.

"Vandyke did paint him," had put in Delia Gasgoyne from behind her mother.

"How do you mean, Delia?" Mrs. Gasgoyne had added, looking curiously at her.

"His picture hangs in the dining-room."

Then the picture had been discussed, and the girl's eyes had followed Gaston—followed him until he had caught their glance. Without an introduction, he had come and dropped into conversation with her, till her mother cleverly interrupted.

Inside the library Lady Belward was comfortably placed, and looking up at Gaston, said:

"You have your father's ways: I hope that you will be wiser."

"If you will teach me!" he answered gently.

There came two little bright spots on her cheeks, and her hands clasped in her lap. They all sat down.

Sir William spoke:

"It is much to ask that you should tell us of your life now, but it is better that we should start with some knowledge of each other."

At that moment Gaston's eyes caught the strange picture on the wall.

"I understand," he answered. "But I would be starting in the middle of a story."

"You mean that you wish to hear your father's history? Did he not tell you?"

"Trifles—that is all."

"Did he ever speak of me?" asked Lady Belward with low anxiety.

"Yes, when he was dying."

"What did he say?"

"He said: 'Tell my mother that Truth waits

long, but whips hard. Tell her that I always loved her.' "

She shrank in her chair as if from a blow, and then was white and motionless.

"Let us hear your story," Sir William said with a sort of hauteur. "You know your own, much of your father's lies buried with him."

"Very well, sir."

Sir William drew a chair up beside his wife. Gaston sat back, and for a moment did not speak. He was looking into distance. Presently the blue of his eyes went all black, and with strange unwavering concentration he gazed straight before him. A light spread over his face, his hands felt for the chair-arms and held them firmly. He began:

"I first remember swinging in a blanket from a pine-tree at a buffalo-hunt while my mother cooked the dinner. There were scores of tents, horses, and many Indians and half-breeds, and a few white men. My father was in command. I can see my mother's face as she stood over the fire. It was not darker than mine; she always seemed more French than Indian, and she was thought comely."

Lady Belward shuddered a little, but Gaston did not notice.

"I can remember the great buffalo-hunt. You heard a heavy rumbling sound; you saw a cloud on the prairie. It heaved, a steam came from it, and

sometimes you caught the flash of ten thousand eyes as the beasts tossed their heads and then bent them again to the ground and rolled on, five hundred men after them, our women shouting and laughing, and arrows and bullets flying. . . . I can remember a time also when a great Indian battle happened just outside the fort, and, with my mother crying after him, my father went out with a priest to stop it. My father was wounded, and then the priest frightened them, and they gathered their dead together and buried them. We lived in a fort for a long time, and my mother died there. She was a good woman, and she loved my father. I have seen her on her knees for hours praying when he was away.—I have her rosary now. They called her Ste. Héloise. Afterwards I was always with my father. He was a good man, but he was never happy; and only at the last would he listen to the priest, though they were always great friends. He was not a Catholic of course, but he said that didn't matter."

Sir William interrupted huskily:

"Why did he never come back?"

"I do not know quite, but he said to me once: 'Gaston, you'll tell them of me some day, and it will be a soft pillow for their heads! You can mend a broken life, but the ring of it is gone!' I think he meant to come back when I was about fourteen; but things happened, and he stayed."

There was a pause. Gaston seemed brooding, and Lady Belward said:

"Go on, please."

"There isn't so very much to tell. The life was the only one I had known, and it was all right. But my father had told me of this life. He taught me himself—he and Father Decluse and a Moravian missionary for awhile. I knew some Latin and history, a bit of mathematics, a good deal of astronomy, some French poets, and Shakespere. Shakespere is wonderful! . . . My father wanted me to come here at once after he died, but I knew better—I wanted to get sense first. So I took a place in the Company. It wasn't all fun. I had to keep my wits sharp. I was only a youngster, and I had to do with men as crafty and as silly as old Polonius. I was sent to Labrador. That was not a life for a Christian. Once a year a ship comes to the port, bringing the year's mail and news from the world. When you watch that ship go out again, and you turn round and see the filthy Esquimaux and Indians, and know that you've got to live for another year with them,—sit in their dirty tepees, eat their raw frozen meat, with an occasional glut of pemmican, and the thermometer 70 degrees below zero,—you get a lump in your throat.

"Then came one winter. I had one white man, two half-breeds, and an Indian with me. There was

darkness day after day, and because the Esquimaux and Indians hadn't come up to the fort that winter, it was lonely as a tomb. One by one the men got melancholy and then went mad, and I had to tie them up, and care for them and feed them. The Indian was all right, but he got afraid, and wanted to start to a mission station three hundred miles on. It was a bad lookout for me, but I told him to go. I was left alone. I was only twenty-one, but I was steel to my toes—good for wear and tear. Well, I had one solid month all alone with my madmen. Their jabbering made me seasick sometimes. At last one day I felt I'd go staring mad myself if I didn't do something exciting to lift me, as it were. I got a revolver, sat at the opposite end of the room from the three lunatics, and practised shooting at them. I had got it into my head that they ought to die, but it was only fair, I thought, to give them a chance. I would try hard to shoot all round them—make a halo of bullets for the head of every one, draw them in silhouettes of solid lead on the wall.

"I talked to them first, and told them what I was going to do. They seemed to understand, and didn't object. I began with the silhouettes, of course. I had a box of bullets beside me. They never squealed. I sent the bullets round them as pretty as the pattern of a milliner. Then I began with their heads. I did two all right. They sat and never stirred. But when

I came to the last something happened. It was Jock Lawson."

Sir William interposed:

"Jock Lawson!—Jock Lawson from here?"

"Yes. His mother keeps 'The Whisk o' Barley.'"

"So, that is where Jock Lawson went? He followed your father?"

"Yes.—Jock was mad enough when I began—clean gone. But, somehow, the game I was playing cured him. 'Steady, Jock!' I said. 'Steady!' for I saw him move. I levelled for the second bead of the halo. My finger was on the trigger. 'My God! don't shoot!' he called. It startled me, my hand shook, the thing went off, and Jock had a bullet through his brain! . . . Then I waked up. Perhaps I had been mad myself—I don't know. But my brain never seemed clearer than when I was playing that game. It was like a magnifying glass: and my eyes were so clear and strong that I could see the pores on their skin, and the drops of sweat breaking out on Jock's forehead when he yelled!"

A low moan came from Lady Belwood. Her face was drawn and pale, but her eyes were on Gaston with a deep fascination. Sir William whispered to her.

"No," she said, "I will stay."

Gaston saw the impression he had made.

"Well, I had to bury poor Jock all alone. I don't think I should have minded it so much, if it hadn't

been for the faces of those other two crazy men. One of them sat still as death, his eyes following me with one long stare, and the other kept praying all the time —he'd been a lay preacher once before he backslided, and it came back on him now naturally. Now it would be from Revelation, now out of the Psalms, and again a swinging exhortation for the Spirit to come down and convict me of sin. There was a lot of sanity in it too, for he kept saying at last: '*O shut not up my soul with the sinners: nor my life with the bloodthirsty.*' I couldn't stand it, with Jock dead there before me, so I gave him a heavy dose of paregoric out of the Company's stores. Before he took it he raised his finger and said to me, with a beastly stare: '*Thou art the man!*' But the paregoric put him to sleep. . . .

"Then I gave the other something to eat, and dragged Jock out to bury him. I remembered then that he couldn't be buried, for the ground was too hard and the ice too thick; so I got ropes, and, when he stiffened, slung him up into a big cedar tree, and then went up myself and arranged the branches about him comfortably. It seemed to me that Jock was a baby and I was his father. You couldn't see any blood, and I fixed his hair so that it covered the hole in the forehead. I remember I kissed him on the cheek, and then said a prayer—one that I 'd got out of my father's prayer-book: '*That it may please*

Thee to preserve all that travel by land or by water, all women labouring of child, all sick persons and young children; and to show Thy pity upon all prisoners and captives.' Somehow I had got it into my head that Jock was going on a long journey, and that I was a prisoner and a captive."

Gaston broke off, and said presently:

"Perhaps this is all too awful to hear, but it gives you an idea of what kind of things went to make me."

Lady Belward answered for both:

"Tell us all—everything!"

"It is late," said Sir William, nervously.

"What does it matter? It is once in a lifetime," she answered sadly.

Gaston took up the thread:

"Now I come to what will shock you even more, perhaps. So, be prepared. I don't know how many days went, but at last I had three visitors—in time I should think: a Moravian missionary, and an Esquimaux and his daughter. I didn't tell the missionary about Jock—there was no use, it could do no good. They stayed four weeks, and during that time one of the crazy men died. The other got better, but had to be watched. I could do anything with him, if I got my eye on him. Somehow, I must tell you, I've got a lot of power that way. I don't know where it comes from. Well, the missionary had to go. The old Esquimaux thought that he and his daughter would stay

on if I'd let them. I was only too glad. But it wasn't wise for the missionary to take the journey alone,—it was a bad business in any case. I urged the man that had been crazy to go, for I thought activity would do him good. He agreed, and the two left and got to the Mission Station all right, after wicked trouble. I was alone with the Esquimaux and his daughter. You never know why certain things happen, and I can't tell why that winter was so weird; why the old Esquimaux should take sick one morning, and in the evening should call me and his daughter Lucy—she'd been given a Christian name, of course—and say that he was going to die, and he wanted me to marry her"—(Lady Belward exclaimed, Sir William's hands fingered the chair-arm nervously)—"there and then, so that he'd know she would be cared for. He was a heathen, but he had been primed by the missionaries about his daughter. She was a fine, clever girl, and well educated—the best product of their mission. So he called for a Bible. There wasn't one in the place, but I had my mother's Book of the Mass. I went to get it, but when I set my eyes on it, I couldn't—no, I couldn't do it, for I hadn't the least idea but what I should bid my lady good-bye when it suited, and I didn't want any swearing at all—not a bit. I didn't do any. But what happened had to be with or without any ring or book and 'Forasmuch as.' There had been so much funeral and sudden death, that a mar-

riage would be a God-send anyhow. So the old Esquimaux got our two hands in his, babbled away in half-English, half-Esquimaux, with the girl's eyes shining like a she-moose over a dying buck, and about the time we kissed each other, his head dropped back—and that is all there was about that!"

Gaston now kept his eyes on his listeners. He was aware that his story must sound to them as brutal as might be, but it was a phase of his life, and, so far as he could, he wanted to start with a clean sheet; not out of love of confidence, for he was self-contained, but he would have enough to do to shepherd his future without shepherding his past. He saw that Lady Belward had a sickly fear in her face, while Sir William had gone stern and hard.

He went on:

"It saved the situation, did that marriage; though it was no marriage you will say. Neither was it one way, and I didn't intend at the start to stand by it an hour longer than I wished. But she was more than I looked for, and it seems to me that she saved my life that winter, or my reason anyhow. There had been so much tragedy that I used to wonder every day what would happen before night: and that's not a good thing for the brain of a chap of twenty-one or two. The funny part of it is that she wasn't a pagan—not a bit! She could read and speak English in a sweet old-fashioned way, and she used to sing to

me—such a funny, sorry little voice she had—hymns the Moravians had taught her, and one or two English songs. I taught her one or two besides, 'Where the Hawthorn Tree is Blooming,' and 'Allan Water' —the first my father had taught me, the other an old Scotch trader. It's different with a woman and a man in a place like that. Two men will go mad together, but there's a saving something in the contact of a man's brain with a woman's. I got fond of her,—any man would have,—for she had something that I never saw in any heathen, certainly in no Indian; you'll see it in women from Iceland. I determined to marry her in regular style when spring and a missionary came. You can't understand, maybe, how one can settle to a life where you've got companionship, and let the world go by. About that time, I thought that I'd let Ridley Court and the rest of it go as a boy's dreams go. I didn't seem to know that I was only satisfied in one set of my instincts. Spring came, so did a missionary, and for better or worse it was!"

Sir William came to his feet.

"My God!" he broke out.

His wife tried to rise, but could not.

"This makes everything impossible," added the baronet shortly.

"Oh no, it makes nothing impossible—if you will listen."

Gaston was cool. He had begun playing for the stakes from one standpoint, and he would not turn back.

He continued:

"I lived with her happily: I never expect to have happiness like that again—never,—and after two years at another post in Labrador, came word from the Company that I might go to Quebec, there to be given my choice of posts. I went. By this time I had again vague ideas that sometime I should come here, but how or why I couldn't tell; I was drifting, and for her sake willing to drift. I was glad to take her to Quebec, for I guessed she would get ideas, and it didn't strike me that she would be out of place. So we went. But she was out of place in many ways. It did not suit at all. We were asked to good houses, for I believe I have always had enough of the Belward in me to keep my end up anywhere. The thing went on pretty well, but at last she used to beg me to go without her to excursions and parties. There were always one or two quiet women whom she liked to sit with, and because she seemed happier for me to go, I did. I was popular, and got along with women well; but I tell you honestly I loved my wife all the time; so that when a Christian busybody poured into her ears some self-made scandal, it was a brutal, awful lie—brutal and awful, for she had never known jealousy: it did not belong to her old social

creed. But it was in the core of her somewhere, and an aboriginal passion at work naked is a thing to be remembered. I had to face it one night. . . .

"I was quiet, and did what I could. After that I insisted on her going with me wherever I went, but she had changed, and I saw that, in spite of herself, the thing grew. One day we went on an excursion down the St. Lawrence. We were merry, and I was telling yarns. We were just nearing a landing-stage, when a pretty girl, with more gush than sense, caught me by the arm and begged some ridiculous thing of me—an autograph, or what not. A minute afterwards I saw my wife spring from the bulwarks down on the landing-stage, and rush up the shore into the woods. . . . We were two days finding her. That settled it! I was sick enough at heart, and I determined to go back to Labrador. We did so. Everything had gone on the rocks. My wife was not, never would be, the same again. She taunted me and worried me, and because I would not quarrel, seemed to have a greater grievance—jealousy is a kind of madness. One night she was most galling, and I sat still and said nothing. My life seemed gone of a heap: I was sick—sick to the teeth; hopeless, looking forward to nothing. I imagine my hard quietness roused her. She said something hateful—something about having married her, and not a woman from Quebec. I smiled —I couldn't help it; then I laughed, a bit wild, I

suppose. I saw the flash of steel. . . . I believe I laughed in her face as I fell. When I came to she was lying with her head on my breast—dead—stone dead!"

Lady Belward sat with closed eyes, her fingers clasping and unclasping on the top of her cane; but Sir William wore a look half-satisfied, half-excited.

He now hurried his story.

"I got well, and after that stayed in the North for a year. Then I passed down the continent to Mexico and South America. There I got a commission to go to New Zealand and Australia to sell a lot of horses. I did so, and spent some time in the South Sea Islands. Again I drifted back to the Rockies and over into the plains; found Jacques Brillon, my servant, had a couple of years' work and play, gathered together some money, as good a horse and outfit as the North could give, and started with Brillon and his broncho,—having got both sense and experience, I hope—for Ridley Court. And here I am! There's a lot of my life that I haven't told you of, but it doesn't matter, because it's adventure mostly, and it can be told at any time; but these are essential facts, and it is better that you should hear them. And that is all, grandfather and grandmother."

After a minute Lady Belward rose, leaned on her crutch, and looked at him wistfully. Sir William said:

"Are you sure that you will suit this life, or it you?"

"It is the only idea I have at present; and, anyhow, it is my rightful home, sir."

"I was not thinking of your rights, but of the happiness of us all."

Lady Belward limped to him, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"You have had one great tragedy, so have we: neither could bear another. Try to be worthy—of your home."

Then she solemnly kissed him on the cheek.

Soon afterwards they went to their rooms.

CHAPTER IV.

AN HOUR WITH HIS FATHER'S PAST.

In his bedroom Gaston made a discovery. He chanced to place his hand in the tail-pocket of the coat he had worn. He drew forth a letter. The ink was faded, and the lines were scrawled. It ran:

"It's no good. Mr. Ian's been! It's face the musik now. If you want me, say so. I'm for kicks or ha'pence—no diffrense. "Yours, J."

He knew the writing very well—Jock Lawson's! There had been some trouble, and Mr. Ian had "been," bringing peril. What was it? His father and Jock had kept the secret from him.

He put his hand in the pocket again. There was another note—this time in a woman's handwriting:

"Oh, come to me, if you would save us both! Do not fail! God help us! Oh, Robert!"

It was signed "Agnes."

Well, here was something of mystery; but he did not trouble himself about that. He was not at Ridley Court to solve mysteries, to probe into the past, to

set his father's wrongs right; but to serve himself, to reap for all those years wherein his father had not reaped. He enjoyed life, and he would search this one to the full of his desires. Before he retired he studied the room, handling things that lay where his father placed them so many years before. He was not without emotions in this, but he held himself firm.

As he stood ready to get into bed, his eyes chanced upon a portrait of his uncle Ian.

"There's where the tug comes!" he said, nodding at it. "Shake hands, and ten paces, Uncle Ian?"

Then he blew out the candle, and in five minutes was sound asleep.

He was out at six o'clock. He made for the stables, and found Jacques pacing the yard. He smiled at Jacques' dazed look.

"What about the horse, Brillon?" he said, nodding as he came up.

"Saracen's had a slice of the stable-boy's shoulder —sir."

Amusement loitered in Gaston's eyes. The "sir" had stuck in Jacques' throat.

"Saracen has established himself, then? Good! And the broncho?"

"*Bien*, a trifle only. They laugh much in the kitchen——"

"The hall, Brillon."

"—— in the hall last night. That hired man over there——"

"That groom, Brillon."

"—— that groom, he was a fool, and fat. He was the worst. This morning he laugh at my broncho. He say a horse like that is nothing: no pace, no travel. I say the broncho was not so ver' bad, and I tell him try the paces. I whisper soft, and the broncho stand like a lamb. He mount, and sneer, and grin at the high pommel, and start. For a minute it was pretty; and then I give a little soft call, and in a minute there was the broncho bucking —doubling like a hoop, and dropping same as lead. Once that—groom—come down on the pommel, then over on the ground like a ball, all muck and blood!"

The half-breed paused, looking innocently before him. Gaston's mouth quirked.

"A solid success, Brillon. Teach them all the tricks you can. At ten o'clock come to my room. The campaign begins then."

Jacques ran a hand through his long black hair, and fingered his sash. Gaston understood.

"The hair and ear-rings may remain, Brillon; but the beard and clothes must go—except for occasions. Come along!"

For the next two hours Gaston explored the stables and the grounds. Nothing escaped him. He gathered every incident of the surroundings, and talked to the

servants freely, softly, and easily, yet with a superiority, which suddenly was imposed in the case of the huntsman at the kennels—for the Whipshire hounds were here. Gaston had never ridden to hounds. It was not, however, his cue to pretend knowledge. He was strong enough to admit ignorance. He stood leaning against the door of the kennels, arms folded, eyes half-closed, with the sense of a painter, before the turning bunch of brown and white, getting the charm of distance and soft tones. His blood beat hard, for suddenly he felt as if he had been behind just such a pack one day, one clear desirable day of spring. He saw people gathering at the kennels; saw men drink beer and eat sandwiches at the door of the huntsman's house,—a long, low dwelling, with crumbling arched doorways like those of a monastery,—watched them get away from the top of the moor, he among them; heard the horn, the whips; and saw the fox break cover. Then came a rare run for five sweet miles—down a long valley—over quick-set hedges, with stiffish streams—another hill—a great combe—a lovely valley stretching out—a swerve to the right—over a gate—and the brush got at a farm-house door!

Surely, he had seen it all; but what kink of the brain was it that the men wore flowing wigs and immense boot-legs, and sported lace in the hunting-field? And why did he see within that picture another of two ladies and a gentleman hawking?

He was roused from his dream by hearing the huntsman say in a quizzical voice:

"How do you like the *dogs*, sir?"

To his last day Lugley, the huntsman, remembered the slow look of cold surprise, of masterful malice, scathing him from head to foot. The words that followed the look, simple as they were, drove home the naked reproof:

"What is your name, my man?"

"Lugley, sir."

"Lugley! Lugley! H'm! Well, Lugley, I like the *hounds* better than I like you. Who is Master of the Hounds, Lugley?"

"Captain Maudsley, sir."

"Just so. You are satisfied with your place, Lugley?"

"Yes, sir," said the man in a humble voice, now cowed.

The news of the arrival of the strangers had come to him late at night, and, with Whipshire stupidity, he had thought that anyone coming from the wilds of British America must be but a savage after all.

"Very well; I wouldn't throw myself out of a place, if I were you."

"Oh, no, sir! Beg pardon, sir; I——"

"Attend to your hounds there, Lugley."

So saying, Gaston nodded Jacques away with him, leaving the huntsman sick with apprehension.

"You see how it is to be done, Brillon?" said Gaston.

Jacques' brown eyes twinkled.

"You have the grand trick, sir."

"I enjoy the game; and so shall you, if you will. You've begun well. I don't know much of this life yet; but it seems to me that they are all part of a machine, not the idea behind the machine. They have no invention. Their machine is easy to learn. Do not pretend; but for every bit you learn show something better, something to make them dizzy now and then."

He paused on a knoll and looked down. The castle, the stables, the cottages of labourers and villagers lay before them. In a certain highly-cultivated field, men were working. It was cut off in squares and patches. It had an air which struck Gaston as unusual; why, he could not tell. But he had a strange divining instinct, or whatever it may be called. He made for the field and questioned the workmen.

The field was cut up into allotment gardens. Here, at a nominal rent, the cottager could grow his vegetables; a little spot of the great acre of England, which gave the labourer a tiny sense of ownership, of manhood. Gaston was interested. More, he was determined to carry that experiment further, if he ever got the chance. There was no socialism in him. The true barbarian is like the true aristocrat: more a

giver of gifts than a lover of co-operation; concerning ownership by right of power and superior independence, hereditary or otherwise. Gaston was both barbarian and aristocrat.

"Brillon," he said, as they walked on, "do you think they would be happier on the prairies with a hundred acres of land, horses, cows, and a pen of pigs?"

"Can I be happy here all at once, sir?"

"That's just it. It's too late for them. They couldn't grasp it unless they went when they were youngsters. They'd long for 'Home and Old England' and this grub-and-grind life. God in heaven, look at them—crumpled-up creatures! And I'll stake my life, they were as pretty children as you'd care to see. They are out of place in the landscape, Brillon; for it is all luxury and lush, and they are crumples—crumples! But yet there isn't any use being sorry for them, for they don't grasp anything outside the life they are living. Can't you guess how they live?—Look at the doors of the houses shut, and the windows sealed; yet they've been up these three hours! And they'll suck in bad air, and bad food; and they'll get cancer, and all that; and they'll die, and be trotted away to the graveyard for 'passun' to hurry them into their little dark cots, in the blessed hope of everlasting life! I'm going to know this thing, Brillon, from tooth to ham-string; and, however it goes, we'll

have lived up and down the whole scale, and that's something!"

He suddenly stopped, and then added:

"I'm likely to go pretty far in this. I can't tell how or why, but it's so. Now, once more, as yesterday afternoon, for good or for bad, for long or for short, for the gods or for the devil, are you with me? There's time to turn back even yet, and I'll say no word to your going."

"*Mon Dieu!* a vow is a vow. When I cannot run I will walk, when I cannot walk I will crawl after you —*comme ça!*"

Lady Belward did not appear at breakfast. Sir William and Gaston breakfasted alone at half-past nine o'clock. The talk was of the stables and the estate generally.

The breakfast-room looked out on a soft lawn, stretching away into a broad park, through which a stream ran; and beyond was a green hill-side. The quiet, the perfect order and discipline, gave a pleasant tingle to Gaston's veins. It was all so easy, and yet so admirable—elegance without weight. He felt at home. He was not certain of some trifles of etiquette; but he and Sir William were alone, and he followed his instincts. Once he frankly asked his grandfather of a matter of form, of which he was uncertain the evening before. The thing was done so naturally that the conventional mind of the baronet was not

disturbed. The Belwards were notable for their brains, and Sir William saw that the young man had an unusual share. He also felt that this startling individuality might make a hazardous future; but he liked the fellow, and he had a debt to pay to the son of his own dead son. Of course, if their wills came into conflict, there could be but one thing—the young man must yield; or, if he played the fool, there must be an end. Still, he hoped the best. When breakfast was finished, he proposed going to the library.

There Sir William talked of the future, asked what Gaston's ideas were, and questioned him as to his present affairs. Gaston frankly said that he wanted to live as his father would have done, and that he had no property, and no money beyond a hundred pounds, which would last him a couple of years on the prairies, but would be fleeting here.

Sir William at once said that he would give him a liberal allowance, with, of course, the run of his own stables and their house in town: and when he married acceptably, his allowance would be doubled.

"And I wish to say, Gaston," he added, "that your uncle Ian, though heir to the title, does not necessarily get the property, which is not entailed. Upon that point I need hardly say more. He has disappointed us. Through him Robert left us. Of his character I need not speak. Of his ability the world speaks variably: he is an artist. Of his morals I need

only say that they are scarcely those of an English gentleman, though whether that is because he is an artist, I cannot say—I really cannot say. I remember meeting a painter at Lord Dunfolly's,—Dunfolly is a singular fellow,—and he struck me chiefly as harmless, distinctly harmless. I could not understand why he was at Dunfolly's, he seemed of so little use, though Lady Malfire, who writes or something, mooned with him a good deal. I believe there was some scandal or something afterwards. I really do not know. But you are not a painter, and I believe you have character—I fancy so."

"If you mean that I don't play fast and loose, sir, you are right. What I do, I do as straight as a needle."

The old man sighed carefully.

"You are very like Robert, and yet there is something else. I don't know, I really don't know what!"

"I ought to have more in me than the rest of the family, sir."

This was somewhat startling. Sir William's fingers stroked his beardless cheek uncertainly.

"Possibly—possibly."

"I've lived a broader life, I've got wider standards, and there are three races at work in me."

"Quite so, quite so;" and Sir William fumbled among his papers nervously.

"Sir," said Gaston suddenly, "I told you last

night the honest story of my life. I want to start fair and square. I want the honest story of my father's life here; how and why he left, and what these letters mean!"

He took from his pocket the notes he had found the night before, and handed them. Sir William read them with a disturbed look, and turned them over and over. Gaston told where he had found them.

Sir William spoke at last.

"The main story is simple enough. Robert was extravagant, and Ian was vicious and extravagant also. Both got into trouble. I was younger then, and severe. Robert hid nothing, Ian all he could. One day things came to a climax. In his wild way, Robert—with Jock Lawson—determined to rescue a young man from the officers of justice, and to get him out of the country. There were reasons. He was the son of a gentleman; and, as we discovered afterwards, Robert had been too intimate with the wife—his one sin of the kind, I believe. Ian came to know, and prevented the rescue. Meanwhile, Robert was liable to the law for the attempt. There was a bitter scene here, and I fear that my wife and I said hard things to Robert."

Gaston's eyes were on Lady Belward's portrait.

"What did my grandmother say?"

There was a pause, then:

"That she would never call him son again, I believe; that the shadow of his life would be hateful to her always. I tell you this because I see you look at that portrait. What I said, I think, was no less. So, Robert, after a wild burst of anger, flung away from us out of the house. His mother, suddenly repenting, ran to follow him, but fell on the stone steps at the door, and became a cripple for life! At first she remained bitter against Robert, and at that time Ian painted that portrait. It is clever, as you may see, and weird. But there came a time when she kept it as a reproach to herself, not Robert. She is a good woman—a very good woman! I know none better, really no one!"

"What became of the arrested man?" Gaston asked quietly, with the oblique suggestiveness of a counsel.

"He died of a broken blood-vessel on the night of the intended rescue, and the matter was hushed up."

"What became of the wife?"

"She died also within a year."

"Were there any children?"

"One—a girl."

"Whose was the child?"

"You mean——?"

"The husband's or the lover's?"

There was a pause.

"I cannot tell you."

"Where is the girl?"

"My son, do not ask that. It can do no good—really no good."

"Is it not my due?"

"Do not impose your due. Believe me, I know best. If ever there is need to tell you, you shall be told. Trust me. Has not the girl her due also?"

Gaston's eyes held Sir William's a moment.

"You are right, sir," he said, "quite right. I shall not try to know. But if——" He paused.

Sir William spoke:

"There is but one person in the world who knows the child's father; and I could not ask him, though I have known him long and well—indeed, no!"

"I do not ask to understand more," Gaston replied. "I almost wish I had known nothing. And yet I will ask one thing: Is the girl in comfort and good surroundings?"

"The best—ah, yes, the very best."

There was a pause, in which both sat thinking; then Sir William wrote out a cheque and offered it, with a hint of emotion. He was recalling how he had done the same with this boy's father.

Gaston understood. He got up, and said:

"Honestly, sir, I don't know how I shall turn out here; for, if I don't like it, it couldn't hold me, or, if it did, I should probably make things uncomfortable.

But I think I shall like it, and I will do my best to make things go well. Good-morning, sir."

With courteous attention Sir William let his grandson out of the room.

And thus did a young man begin his career as Gaston Belward, Gentleman.

CHAPTER V.

WHEREIN HE FINDS HIS ENEMY.

How that career was continued there are many histories: Jock Lawson's mother tells of it in her way, Mrs. Gasgoyne in hers, Hovey in hers, Captain Maudsley in his; and so on. Each looks at it from an individual standpoint. But all agree on two matters: that he did things hitherto unknown in the country-side; and that he was free and affable, but could pull one up smartly if necessary.

He would sit by the hour and talk with Bimley, the cottager; with Rosher, the hotel-keeper, who when young had travelled far; with a sailor-man, home for a holiday, who said he could spin a tidy yarn; and with Pogan, the groom, who had at last won Saracen's heart. But one day when the meagre village chemist saw him cracking jokes with Beard the carpenter, and sidled in with a silly air of equality, which was merely insolence, Gaston softly dismissed him with his ears tingling. The carpenter proved his right to be a friend of Gaston's by not changing

countenance and by never speaking of the thing afterwards.

His career was interesting during the eighteen months wherein society papers chatted of him amiably and romantically. He had entered into the joys of hunting with enthusiasm and success, and had made a fast and admiring friend of Captain Maudsley; while Saracen held his own grandly. He had dined with county people, and had dined them; had entered upon the fag-end of the London season with keen, amused enjoyment; and had engrafted every little use of the convention. The art was learned, but the man was always apart from it; using it as a toy, yet not despising it; for, as he said, it had its points, it was necessary. There was yachting in the summer; but he was keener to know the life of England and his heritage than to roam afar, and most of the year was spent on the estate and thereabouts: with the steward, with the justices of the peace, in the fields, in the kennels, among the accounts.

To-day he was in London, haunting Tattersall's, the East End, the docks, his club, the London Library —he had a taste for English history, especially for that of the seventeenth century; he saturated himself with it: to-morrow he would present to his grandfather a scheme for improving the estate and benefiting the cottagers. Or he would suddenly enter the village school, and daze and charm the children by

asking them strange yet simple questions, which sent a shiver of interest to their faces.

One day at the close of his second hunting-season there was to be a ball at the Court, the first public declaration of acceptance by his people; for, at his wish, they did not entertain for him in town the previous season—Lady Belward had not lived in town for years. But all had gone so well,—if not with absolute smoothness, and with some strangeness,—that Gaston had become an integral part of their life, and they had ceased to look for anything sensational.

This ball was to be the seal of their approval. It had been mentioned in *Truth* with that freshness and point all its own. What character than Gaston's could more appeal to its naïve imagination? It said in a piquant note that he did not wear a dagger and sombrero.

Everything was ready. Decorations were up, the cook and the butler had done their parts. At eleven in the morning Gaston had time on his hands. Walking out, he saw two or three children peeping in at the gateway.

He would visit the village school. He found the junior curate troubling the youthful mind with what their godfathers and godmothers did for them, and begging them to do their duty "in that state of life," etc. He listened, wondering at the pious opacity, and presently asked the children to sing. With inimita-

ble melancholy they sang, "Oh, the Roast Beef of Old England!"

Gaston sat back and laughed softly till the curate felt uneasy, till the children, waking to his humour, gurgled a little in the song. With his thumbs caught lightly in his waistcoat pockets, he presently began to talk with the children in an easy, quiet voice. He asked them little out-of-the-way questions, he lifted the school-room from their minds, and then he told them a story, showing them on the map where the place was, giving them distances, the kind of climate, and a dozen other matters of information, without the nature of a lesson. Then he taught them the chorus —the Board forbade it afterwards—of a negro song, which told how those who behaved themselves well in this world should ultimately,

"Blow on, blow on, blow on dat silver horn!"

It was on this day that, as he left the school, he saw Ian Belward driving past. He had not met his uncle since his arrival,—the artist had been in Morocco,—nor had he heard of him save through a note in a newspaper which said that he was giving no powerful work to the world, nor, indeed, had done so for several years; and that he preferred the purlieus of Montparnasse to Holland Park.

They recognised each other. Ian looked his nephew up and down with a cool kind of insolence

as he passed, but did not make any salutation. Gaston went straight to the castle. He asked for his uncle, and was told that he had gone to Lady Belward. He wandered to the library: it was empty. He lit a cigar, took down a copy of Matthew Arnold's poems, opening at "Sohrab and Rustum," read it with a quick-beating heart, and then came to "Tristram and Iseult." He knew little of "that Arthur" and his knights of the Round Table, and Iseult of Brittany was a new figure of romance to him. In Tennyson, he had got no further than "Locksley Hall," which, he said, had a right tune and wrong words; and "Maud," which "was big in pathos." The story and the metre of "Tristram and Iseult" beat in his veins. He got to his feet, and, standing before the window, repeated a verse aloud:

> "Cheer, cheer thy dogs into the brake,
> O hunter! and without a fear
> Thy golden-tassell'd bugle blow,
> And through the glades thy pasture take—
> For thou wilt rouse no sleepers here!
> For these thou seest are unmoved;
> Cold, cold as those who lived and loved
> A thousand years ago."

He was so engrossed that he did not hear the door open. He again repeated the lines with the affectionate modulation of a musician. He knew that they were right. They were hot with life—a life that was no more a part of this peaceful landscape than a palm-

tree would be. He felt that he ought to read the poem in a desert, out by the Polar Sea, down on the Amazon, yonder at Nukualofa; that it would fit in with bearding the Spaniards two hundred years ago! Bearding the Spaniards!—What did he mean by that? He shut his eyes and saw a picture: A Moorish castle, men firing from the battlements under a blazing sun, a multitude of troops before a tall splendid-looking man, in armour chased with gold and silver, and fine ribbons flying. A woman was lifted upon the battlements. He saw the gold of her necklace shake on her flesh like sunlight on little waves. He heard a cry——

At that moment someone said behind him:

"You have your father's romantic manner."

He quietly put down the book, and met the other's eyes with a steady directness.

"Your memory is good, sir."

"Less than thirty years—h'm, not so very long!"

"Looking back—no. You are my father's brother, Ian Belward?"

"Your uncle Ian."

There was a kind of quizzical loftiness in Ian Belward's manner.

"Well, Uncle Ian, my father asked me to say that he hoped you would get as much out of life as he had, and that you would leave it as honest."

"Thank you. That is very like Robert. He loved

making little speeches. It is a pity we did not pull together; but I was hasty, and he was rash. He had a foolish career, and you are the result. My mother has told me the story—his and yours."

He sat down, ran his fingers through his grey-brown hair, and looking into a mirror, adjusted the bow of his tie, and flipped the flying ends. The kind of man was new to Gaston: self-indulgent, intelligent, heavily nourished, nonchalant, with a coarse kind of handsomeness. He felt that here was a man of the world, equipped mentally cap-à-pie, as keen as cruel. Reading that in the light of the past, he was ready.

"And yet his rashness will hurt you longer than your haste hurt him!"

The artist took the hint bravely.

"That you will have the estate, and I the title, eh? Well, that looks likely just now; but I doubt it all the same. You'll mess the thing one way or another."

He turned from the contemplation of himself, and eyed Gaston lazily. Suddenly he started.

"Begad," he said, "where did you get it?"

He rose.

Gaston understood that he saw the resemblance to Sir Gaston Belward.

"Before you were, I am. I am nearer the real stuff."

The other measured his words insolently:

"But the Pocahontas soils the stream—that's plain!"

A moment after Gaston was beside the prostrate body of his uncle, feeling his heart.

"Good God," he said, "I didn't think I hit so hard!"

He felt the pulse, looked at the livid face, then caught open the waistcoat and put his ear to the chest. He did it all coolly, though swiftly—he was born for action and incident. And during that moment of suspense he thought of a hundred things, chiefly that, for the sake of the family—the family!—he must not go to trial. There were easier ways.

But presently he found that the heart beat.

"Good! good!" he said, undid the collar, got some water, and rang a bell. Falby came. Gaston ordered some brandy, and asked for Sir William. After the brandy had been given, consciousness returned. Gaston lifted him up.

He presently swallowed more brandy, and while yet his head was at Gaston's shoulder, said:

"You are a hard hitter. But you've certainly lost the game now!"

Here he made an effort, and with Gaston's assistance got to his feet. At that moment Falby entered to say that Sir William was not in the house. With a wave of the hand Gaston dismissed him. Deathly

pale, his uncle lifted his eyebrows at the graceful gesture.

"You do it fairly, nephew," he said ironically yet faintly,—"fairly in such little things; but a gentleman, your uncle, your elder, with fists!—that smacks of low company!"

Gaston made a frank reply as he smothered his pride:

"I am sorry for the blow, sir; but was the fault all mine?"

"The fault? Is that the question? Faults and manners are not the same. At bottom you lack in manners; and that will ruin you at last!"

"You slighted my mother!"

"Oh, no! and if I had, you should not have seen it."

"I am not used to swallow insults. It is your way, sir. I know your dealings with my father!"

"A little more brandy, please. But your father had manners, after all. You are as rash as he; and in essential matters clownish—which he was not."

Gaston was well in hand now, cooler even than his uncle.

"Perhaps you will sum up your criticism now, sir, to save future explanation; and then accept my apology."

"To apologise for what no gentleman pardons or does, or acknowledges openly when done!—H'm!

Were it not well to pause in time, and go back to your wild North? Why so difficult a saddle—Tartarin after Napoleon? Think—Tartarin's end!"

Gaston deprecated with a gesture:

"Can I do anything for you, sir?"

His uncle now stood up, but swayed a little, and winced from sudden pain. A wave of malice crossed his face.

"It's a pity we are relatives, with France so near!" he said, "for I see you love fighting." After an instant he added, with a carelessness as much assumed as natural: "You may ring the bell, and tell Falby to come to my room. And because I am to appear at the flare-up to-night—all in honour of the prodigal's son,—this matter is between us, and we meet as loving relatives! You understand my motives, Gaston Robert Belward?"

"Thoroughly."

Gaston rang the bell, and went to open the door for his uncle to pass out. Ian Belward buttoned his close-fitting coat, cast a glance in the mirror, and then eyed Gaston's fine figure and well-cut clothes. In the presence of his nephew, there grew the envy of a man who knew that youth was passing while every hot instinct and passion remained. For his age he was impossibly young. Well past fifty he looked thirty-five, no more. His luxurious soul loathed the approach of age. Unlike many men of indulgent natures, he loved

youth for the sake of his art, and he had sacrificed upon that altar more than most men—sacrificed others! His cruelty was not as that of the roughs of Seven Dials or Belleville, but it was pitiless. He admitted to those who asked him why and wherefore when his selfishness became brutality, that everything had to give way for his work. His painting of Ariadne represented the misery of two women's lives. And of such was his kingdom of Art.

As he now looked at Gaston he was again struck with the resemblance to the portrait in the dining-room, with his foreign out-of-the-way air: something that should be seen beneath the flowing wigs of the Stuart period. He had long wanted to do a statue of the ill-fated Monmouth, and another greater than that. Here was the very man: with a proud, daring, homeless look, a splendid body, and a kind of cavalier conceit. It was significant of him, of his attitude towards himself where his work was concerned, that he suddenly turned and shut the door again, telling Falby, who appeared, to go to his room; and then said:

"You are my debtor, Cadet—I shall call you that: you shall have a chance of paying."

"How?"

In a few concise words he explained, scanning the other's face eagerly.

Gaston showed nothing. He had passed the apogee of irritation.

"A model?" he questioned drily.

"Well, if you put it that way. 'Portrait' sounds better. It shall be Gaston Belward, gentleman; but we will call it in public, 'Monmouth the Trespasser.'"

Gaston did not wince. He had taken all the revenge he needed. The idea rather pleased him than otherwise. He had instincts about art, and he liked pictures, statuary, poetry, romance; but he had no standards. He was keen also to see the life of the artist, to touch that aristocracy more distinguished by mind than manners.

"If that gives 'clearance,' yes. And your debt to me?"

"I owe you nothing. You find your own meaning in my words. I was railing, you were serious. Do not be serious. Assume it sometimes, if you will; be amusing mostly. So, you will let me paint you—on your own horse, eh?"

"That is asking much. Where?"

"Oh, a sketch here this afternoon, while the thing is hot—if this damned headache stops! Then at my studio in London in the spring, or"—here he laughed—"in Paris. I am modest, you see!"

"As you will."

Gaston had had a desire for Paris, and this seemed to give a cue for going. He had tested London nearly all round. He had yet to be presented at St. James's, and elected a member of the Bachelors Club. Cer-

tainly he had not visited the Tower, Windsor Castle, and the Zoo; but that would only disqualify him in the eyes of a Colonial.

His uncle's face flushed slightly. He had not expected such good fortune. He felt that he could do anything with this romantic figure. He would do two pictures: Monmouth, and an ancient subject—that legend of the ancient city of Ys, on the coast of Brittany. He had had it in his mind for years. He came back and sat down, keen, eager.

"I've a big subject brewing," he said; "better than the Monmouth, though it is good enough as I shall handle it. It shall be royal, melancholy, devilish: a splendid bastard with creation against him; the best, most fascinating subject in English history. The son dead on against the father—and the uncle!"

He ceased for a minute, fashioning the picture in his mind; his face pale, but alive with interest, which his enthusiasm made into dignity. Then he went on:

"But the other: when the king takes up the woman—his mistress—and rides into the sea with her on his horse, to save the town! By God, with you to sit, it's my chance! You've got it all there in you—the immense manner! You, a nineteenth century gentleman, to do this game of Ridley Court, and paddle round the Row?—Not you! You're clever, and you're crafty, and you've a way with you!

But you'll come a cropper at this as sure as I shall paint two big pictures—if you'll stand to your word!"

"We need not discuss my position here. I am in my proper place—in my father's home. But for the paintings and Paris, as you please!"

"That is sensible—Paris is sensible; for you ought to see it right, and I'll show you what half the world never see, and wouldn't appreciate if they did. You've got that old, barbaric taste, romance, and you'll find your *métier* in Paris."

Gaston now knew the most interesting side of his uncle's character,—which few people ever saw, and they mostly women who came to wish they had never felt the force of that occasional enthusiasm. He had been in the National Gallery several times, and over and over again he had visited the picture places in Bond Street as he passed; but he wanted to get behind art life, to dig out the heart of it.

CHAPTER VI.

WHICH TELLS OF STRANGE ENCOUNTERS.

A FEW hours afterwards Gaston sat on his horse, in a quiet corner of the grounds, while his uncle sketched him. After a time he said that Saracen would remain quiet no longer. His uncle held up the sketch. Gaston could scarcely believe that so strong and life-like a thing were possible in the time. It had force and imagination. He left his uncle with a nod, rode quietly through the park, into the village, and on to the moor. At the top he turned and looked down. The perfectness of the landscape struck him; it was as if the picture had all grown there—not a suburban villa, not a modern cottage, not one tall chimney of a manufactory, but just the sweet common life. The noises of the village were soothing, the soft smell of the woodland came over. He watched a cart go by, idly heavily clacking.

As he looked, it came to him: was his uncle right after all? Was he out of place here? He was not a part of this, though he had adapted himself and had learned many fine social ways. He knew that he lived not exactly as though born here and grown up with

it all. But it was also true that he had a native sense of courtesy which people called distinguished. There was ever a kind of mannered deliberation in his bearing—a part of his dramatic temper, and because his father had taught him dignity where there were no social functions for its use. His manner had, therefore, a carefulness which in him was elegant artifice.

It could not be complained that he did not act after the fashion of gentle people when with them. But it was equally true that he did many things which the friends of his family could not and would not have done. For instance, none would have pitched a tent in the grounds, slept in it, read in it, and lived in it—when it did not rain. Probably no one of them would have, at individual expense, sent the wife of the village policeman to a hospital in London, to be cured—or to die—of cancer. None would have troubled to insist that a certain stagnant pool in the village be filled up. Nor would one have suddenly risen in court and have acted as counsel for a gipsy! At the same time, all were too well-bred to think that Gaston did this because the gipsy had a daughter with him, a girl of strong, wild beauty, with a look of superiority over her position.

He thought of all the circumstances now.

It was very many months ago. The man had been accused of stealing and assault, but the evidence was

unconvincing to Gaston. The feeling in court was against the gipsy. Fearing a verdict against him, Gaston rose and cross-examined the witnesses, and so adroitly bewildered both them and the justices who sat with his grandfather on the case, that, at last, he secured the man's freedom. The girl was French, and knew English imperfectly. Gaston had her sworn, and made the most of her evidence. Then, learning that an assault had been made on the gipsy's van by some lads who worked at mills in a neighbouring town, he pushed for their arrest, and himself made up the loss to the gipsy.

It is possible that there was in the mind of the girl what some common people thought: that the thing was done for her favour; for she viewed it half gratefully, half frowningly, till, on the village green, Gaston asked her father what he wished to do—push on or remain to act against the lads.

The gipsy, angry as he was, wished to move on. Gaston lifted his hat to the girl and bade her good-bye. Then she saw that his motives had been wholly unselfish — even quixotic, as it appeared to her, — silly, she would have called it, if silliness had not seemed unlikely in him. She had never met a man like him before. She ran her fingers through her golden-brown hair nervously, caught at a flying bit of old ribbon at her waist, and said in French:

"He is honest altogether, sir. He did not steal, and he was not there when it happened."

"Oh, I know that, my girl. That is why I did it!"

She looked at him keenly. Her eyes ran up and down his figure, then met his curiously. Their looks swam for a moment. Something thrilled in them both. The girl took a step nearer.

"You are as much a Romany here as I am," she said, touching her bosom with a quick gesture. "You do not belong; you are too good for it. How do I know? I do not know; I feel. I will tell your fortune," she suddenly added, reaching for his hand. "I have only known three that I could do it with honestly and truly, and you are one. It is no lie. There is something in it. My mother had it; but it's all sham mostly."

Then, under a tree on the green, he indifferent to village gossip, she took his hand and told him—not of his fortune alone. In half-coherent fashion she told him of the past—of his life in the North. She then spoke of his future. She told him of a woman, of another, and another still; of an accident at sea, and of a quarrel; then, with a low, wild laugh, she stopped, let go his hand, and would say no more. But her face was all flushed, and her eyes like burning beads. Her father stood near, listening. Now he took her by the arm.

"Here, Andrée, that's enough," he said, with rough kindness; "it's no good for you or him."

He turned to Gaston, and said in English:

"She's sing'lar, like her mother afore her. But she's straight!"

Gaston lit a cigar.

"Of course." He looked kindly at the girl. "You are a weird sort, Andrée, and perhaps you are right that I'm a Romany too; but I don't know where it begins and where it ends.—You are not English gipsies?" he added, to the father.

"I lived in England when I was young. Her mother was a Breton—not a Romany. We're on the way to France now. She wants to see where her mother was born. She's got the Breton lingo, and she knows some English; but she speaks French mostly."

"Well, well," rejoined Gaston; "take care of yourself, and good luck to you. Good-bye—good-bye, Andrée."

He put his hand in his pocket to give her some money, but changed his mind. Her eye stopped him. He shook hands with the man, then turned to her again. Her eyes were on him—hot, shining. He felt his blood throb, but he returned the look with good-natured nonchalance, shook her hand, raised his hat, and walked away, thinking what a fine, handsome creature she was. Presently he said: "Poor girl!

she'll look at some fellow like that one day, with tragedy the end thereof!"

He then fell to wondering about her almost uncanny divination. He knew that all his life he himself had had strange memories, as well as certain peculiar powers which had put the honest phenomena and the trickery of the Medicine Men in the shade. He had influenced people by the sheer force of presence. As he walked on, he came to a group of trees in the middle of the common. He paused for a moment, and looked back. The gipsy's van was moving away, and in the doorway stood the girl, her hand over her eyes, looking towards him. He could see the raw colour of her scarf. "She'll make wild trouble!" he said to himself.

As Gaston thought of this event, he moved his horse slowly towards a combe, and looked out over a noble expanse—valley, field, stream, and church-spire. As he gazed, he saw seated at some distance a girl reading. Not far from her were two boys climbing up and down the combe. He watched them. Presently he saw one boy creep along a shelf of rock where the combe broke into a quarry, let himself drop upon another shelf below, and then perch upon an overhanging ledge. He presently saw that the lad was now afraid to return. He heard the other lad cry out, saw the girl start up, and run forward, look

over the edge of the combe, and then make as if to go down. He set his horse to the gallop, and called out. The girl saw him, and paused. In two minutes he was off his horse and beside her.

It was Alice Wingfield. She had brought out three boys, who had come with her from London, where she had spent most of the year nursing their sick mother, her relative.

"I'll have him up in a minute," he said, as he led Saracen to a sapling near. "Don't go near the horse."

He swung himself down from ledge to ledge, and soon was beside the boy. In another moment he had the youngster on his back, came slowly up, and the adventurer was safe.

"Silly Walter," the girl said, "to frighten yourself and give Mr. Belward trouble!"

"I didn't think I'd be afraid," protested the lad; "but when I looked over the ledge my head went round, and I felt sick like with the channel."

Gaston had seen Alice Wingfield several times at church and in the village, and once when, with Lady Belward, he had returned the archdeacon's call; but she had been away most of the time since his arrival. She had impressed him as a gentle, wise, elderly little creature, who appeared to live for others, and chiefly for her grandfather. She was not unusually pretty, nor yet young,—quite as old as himself,—and yet he

wondered what it was that made her so interesting. He decided that it was the honesty of her nature, her beautiful thoroughness; and then he thought little more about her. But now he dropped into quiet, natural talk with her, as if they had known each other for years. But most women found that they dropped quickly into easy talk with him. That was because he had not learned the small gossip which varies little with a thousand people in the same circumstances. But he had a naïve fresh sense, everything interested him, and he said what he thought with taste and tact, sometimes with wit, and always in that cheerful contemplative mood which influences women. Some of his sayings were so startling and heretical that they had gone the rounds, and certain crisp words out of the *argot* of the North were used by women who wished to be *chic* and amusing.

Not quite certain why he stayed, but talking on reflectively, Gaston at last said:

"You will be coming to us to-night, of course? We are having a barbecue of some kind."

"Yes, I hope so; though my grandfather does not much care to have me go."

"I suppose it is dull for him."

"Oh, I am not sure it is that."

"No? What then?"

She shook her head.

"The affair is in your honour, Mr. Belward, isn't it?"

"Does that answer my question?" he asked genially.

She blushed.

"Oh, no, no! That is not what I meant."

"I was unfair. Yes, I believe the matter does take that colour; though why, I don't know."

She looked at him with simple earnestness.

"You ought to be proud of it; and you ought to be glad of such a high position where you can do so much good, if you will."

He smiled, and ran his hand down his horse's leg musingly before he replied:

"I've not thought much of doing good, I tell you frankly. I wasn't brought up to *think* about it; I don't know that I ever did any good in my life. I supposed it was only missionaries and women who did that sort of thing."

"Oh, you wrong yourself. You have done good in this village. Why, we all have talked of it; and though it wasn't done in the usual way—rather irregularly—still it was doing good."

He looked down at her astonished.

"Well, here's a pretty libel! Doing good 'irregularly'! Why, where have I done good at all?"

She ran over the names of several sick people in the village whose bills he had paid, the personal help

and interest he had given to many, and, last of all, she mentioned the case of the village postmaster.

Since Gaston had come, postmasters had been changed. The little pale-faced man who had first held the position disappeared one night, and in another twenty-four hours a new one was in his place. Many stories had gone about. It was rumoured that the little man was short in his accounts, and had been got out of the way by Gaston Belward. Archdeacon Varcoe knew the truth, and had said that Gaston's sin was not unpardonable, in spite of a few squires and their dames who declared it was shocking that a man should have such loose ideas, that no good could come to the county from it, and that he would put nonsense into the heads of the common people. Alice Wingfield was now to hear Gaston's view of the matter.

"So that's it, eh? Live and let live is doing good? In that case it is easy to be a saint. What else could a man do? You say that I am generous—How? What have I spent out of my income on these little things? My income!—How did I get it? I didn't earn it; neither did my father. Not a stroke have I done for it. I sit high and dry there in the Court, they sit low there in the village; and you know how they live. Well, I give away a little money which these people and their fathers earned for my father and me; and for that you say I am doing good, and

some other people say I am doing harm—'dangerous charity,' and all that! I say that the little I have done is what is always done where man is most primitive, by people who never heard 'doing good' preached."

"We must have names for things, you know," she said.

"I suppose so, where morality and humanity have to be taught as Christian duty, and not as common manhood."

"Tell me," she presently said, "about Sproule, the postmaster."

"Oh, that? Well, I will. The first time I entered the post-office I saw there was something on the man's mind. A youth of twenty-three oughtn't to look as he did—married only a year or two also, with a pretty wife and child. I used to talk to them a good deal, and one day I said to him, 'You look seedy; what's the matter?' He flushed, and got nervous. I made up my mind it was money. If I had been here longer, I should have taken him aside and talked to him like a father. As it was, things slid along. I was up in town, and here and there. One evening as I came back from town I saw a nasty-looking Jew arrive. The little postmaster met him, and they went away together. He was in the scoundrel's hands; had been betting, and had borrowed first from the Jew, then from the Government. The next evening

I was just starting down to have a talk with him, when an official came to my grandfather to swear out a warrant. I lost no time; got my horse and trap, went down to the office, gave the boy three minutes to tell me the truth, and then I sent him away. I fixed it up with the authorities, and the wife and child follow the youth to America next week. That's all."

"He deserved to get free, then?"

"He deserved to be punished, but not as he would have been. There wasn't really a vicious spot in the man. And the wife and child!—What was a little justice to the possible happiness of those three? Discretion is a part of justice, and I used it, as it is used every day in business and judicial life, only we don't see it. When it gets public, why, someone gets blamed. In this case I was the target; but I don't mind in the least—not in the least. . . . Do you think me very startling or lawless?"

"Never lawless; but one could not be quite sure what you would do in any particular case." She looked up at him admiringly.

They had not noticed the approach of Archdeacon Varcoe till he was very near them. His face was troubled. He had seen how earnest was their conversation, and for some reason it made him uneasy. The girl saw him first, and ran to meet him. He saw her bright delighted look, and he sighed involuntarily.

"Something has worried you," she said caressingly.

Then she told him of the accident, and they all turned and went back towards the Court, Gaston walking his horse. Near the church they met Sir William and Lady Belward. There were salutations, and presently Gaston slowly followed his grandfather and grandmother into the courtyard.

Sir William, looking back, said to his wife:

"Do you think that Gaston should be told?"

"Oh, no, no! there is no danger. Gaston, my dear, shall marry Delia Gasgoyne."

"Shall marry? wherefore 'shall'? Really, I do not see."

"She likes him, she is quite what we would have her, and he is interested in her. Oh, my dear, I have seen—I have watched for a year."

He put his hand on hers.

"My wife, you are a goodly prophet."

When Archdeacon Varcoe entered his study on returning, he sat down in a chair, and brooded long.

"She must be told," he said at last, aloud. "Yes, yes, at once. God help us both!"

CHAPTER VII.

WHEREIN THE SEAL OF HIS HERITAGE IS SET.

"SOPHIE, when you talk with the man, remember that you are near fifty, and faded. Don't be sentimental."

So said Mrs. Gasgoyne to Lady Dargan, as they saw Gaston coming down the ball-room with Captain Maudsley.

"Reiné, you try one's patience. People would say you were not quite disinterested."

"You mean Delia! Now, listen. I haven't any wish but that Gaston Belward shall see Delia very seldom indeed. He will inherit the property no doubt, and Sir William told me that he had settled a decent fortune on him; but for Delia—no—no—no! Strange, isn't it, when Lady Harriet over there aches for him, Indian blood and all? And why? Because this is a good property, and the fellow is distinguished and romantic-looking: but he is impossible—perfectly impossible! Every line of his face says shipwreck."

"You are not usually so prophetic."

"Of course. But I am prophetic now, for Delia

is more than interested, silly chuck! Did you ever read the story of the other Gaston—Sir Gaston—whom this one resembles? No? Well, you will find it thinly disguised in *The Knight of Five Joys.* He was killed at Naseby, my dear; killed, not by the enemy, but by a page in Rupert's cavalry. The page was a woman! It's in this one too. Indian and French blood is a sad tincture. He is not wicked at heart, not at all; but he will do mad things yet, my dear. For he'll tire of all this, and then—half-mourning for someone!"

Gaston enjoyed talking with Mrs. Gasgoyne as to no one else. Other women often flattered him, she never did. Frankly, crisply, she told him strange truths, and, without mercy, crumbled his wrong opinions. He had a sense of humour, and he enjoyed her keen chastening raillery. Besides, her talk was always an education in the fine lights and shadows of this social life. He came to her now with a smile, greeted her heartily, and then turned to Lady Dargan. Captain Maudsley carried off Mrs. Gasgoyne, and the two were left together—the second time since the evening of Gaston's arrival, so many months before. Lady Dargan had been abroad, and was just returned.

They talked a little on unimportant things, and presently Lady Dargan said:

"Pardon my asking, but will you tell me why you

wore a red ribbon in your button-hole the first night you came?"

He smiled, and then looked at her a little curiously.

"My luggage had not come, and I wore an old suit of my father's."

Lady Dargan sighed deeply.

"The last night he was in England he wore that coat at dinner," she murmured.

"Pardon me, Lady Dargan: you put that ribbon there?"

"Yes."

Her eyes were on him with a candid interest and regard.

"I suppose," he went on, "that his going was abrupt to you?"

"Very—very!" she answered.

She longed to ask if his father ever mentioned her name, but she dared not. Besides, as she said to herself, to what good now? But she asked him to tell her something about his father. He did so quietly, picking out main incidents, and setting them forth, as he had the ability, with quiet dramatic strength. He had just finished when Delia Gasgoyne came up with Lord Dargan.

Presently Lord Dargan asked Gaston if he would bring Lady Dargan to the other end of the room, where Miss Gasgoyne was to join her

mother. As they went, Lady Dargan said a little breathlessly:

"Will you do something for me?"

"I would do much for you," was his reply, for he understood!

"If ever you need a friend, if ever you are in trouble, will you let me know? I wish to take an interest in you. Promise me."

"I cannot promise, Lady Dargan," he answered, "for such trouble as I have had before I have had to bear alone, and the habit is fixed, I fear. Still, I am grateful to you just the same, and I shall never forget it. But will you tell me why people regard me from so tragical a standpoint?"

"Do they?"

"Well, there's yourself, and there's Mrs. Gascoyne, and there's my uncle Ian."

"Perhaps we think you may have trouble because of your uncle Ian."

Gaston shook his head enigmatically, and then said ironically:

"As they would put it in the North, Lady Dargan, He'll cut no figure in that matter. I remember for two!"

"That is right—that is right. Always think that Ian Belward is bad—bad at heart. He is as fascinating as——"

"As the Snake?"

"—as the Snake, and as cruel! It is the cruelty of wicked selfishness. Somehow, I forget that I am talking to his nephew. But we all know Ian Belward—at least, all women do."

"And at least one man does," he answered gravely.

The next minute Gaston walked down the room with Delia Gasgoyne on his arm. The girl delicately showed her preference, and he was aware of it. It pleased him—pleased his unconscious egoism. The early part of his life had been spent among Indian women, half-breeds, and a few dull French or English folk, whose chief charm was their interest in that wild, free life, now so distant. He had met Delia many times since his coming; and there was that in her manner,—a fine high-bred quality, a sweet speaking reserve—which interested him. He saw her as the best product of this convention.

She was no mere sentimental girl, for she had known at least six seasons, and had refused at least six lovers. She had a proud mind, not wide, suited to her position. Most men had flattered her, had yielded to her; this man, either with art or instinctively, mastered her, secured her interest by his personality. Every woman worth the having, down in her heart, loves to be mastered: it gives her a sense of security, and she likes to lean; for, strong as she may be at times, she is often singularly weak. She knew that her mother deprecated "that Belward

enigma," but this only sent her on the dangerous way.

To-night she questioned him about his life, and how he should spend the summer. Idling in France, he said. And she? She was not sure; but she thought that she also would be idling about France in her father's yacht. So they might happen to meet. Meanwhile? Well, meanwhile, there were people coming to stay at Peppingham, their home. August would see that over. Then freedom.

Was it freedom, to get away from all this—from England and rule and measure? No, she did not mean quite that. She loved the life with all its rules; she could not live without it. She had been brought up to expect and to do certain things. She liked her comforts, her luxuries, many pretty things about her, and days without friction. To travel? Yes, with all modern comforts, no long stages, a really good maid, and some fresh interesting books.

What kind of books? Well, Walter Pater's essays; "The Light of Asia"; a novel of that wicked man Thomas Hardy; and something light—"The Innocents Abroad"—with, possibly, a struggle through De Musset, to keep up her French.

It did not seem exciting to Gaston, but it did sound honest, and it was in the picture. He preferred George Meredith, and Swinburne, and Dumas,

and Hugo; but with her he did also like the whimsical Mark Twain.

He thought of the hints that Lady Belward had often thrown out; of those many talks with Sir William, excellent friends as they were, in which the baronet hinted at the security he would feel if there was a second family of Belwards. What if he——? He smiled strangely, and shrank.

Marriage? There was the touchstone.

After the dance, when he was taking her to her mother, he saw a pale intense face looking out to him from a row of others. He smiled, and the smile that came in return was unlike any he had ever seen Alice Wingfield wear. He was puzzled. It flashed to him strange pathos, affection, and entreaty. He took Delia Gasgoyne to her mother, talked to Lady Belward a little, and then went quietly back to where he had seen Alice. She was gone. Just then some people from town came to speak to him, and he was detained. When he was free he searched, but she was nowhere to be found. He went to Lady Belward. Yes, Miss Wingfield had gone. Lady Belward looked at Gaston anxiously, and asked him why he was curious.

"Because she's a lonely-looking little maid," he said, "and I wanted to be kind to her. See didn't seem happy a while ago."

Lady Belward was reassured.

"Yes, she is a sweet creature, Gaston," she said, and added: "You are a good boy to-night, a very good host indeed. It is worth the doing," she went on, looking out on the guests proudly. "I did not think I should ever come to it again with any heart, but I do it for you gladly. Now, away to your duty," she added, tapping his breast affectionately with her fan, "and when everything is done, come and take me to my boudoir."

Ian Belward passed Gaston as he went. He had seen the affectionate passages.

"'For a good boy!' 'God bless our Home!'" he said, ironically.

Gaston saw the mark of his hand on his uncle's chin, and he forbore ironical reply.

"The home is worth the blessing," he rejoined quietly, and passed on.

Three hours later the guests had all gone, and Lady Belward, leaning on her grandson's arm, went to her boudoir, while Ian and his father sought the library. Ian was going next morning. The conference was not likely to be cheerful.

Inside her boudoir, Lady Belward sank into a large chair, and let her head fall back and her eyes close. She motioned Gaston to a seat. Taking one near, he waited. After a time she opened her eyes and drew herself up.

"My dear," she said, "I wish to talk with you."

"I shall be very glad; but isn't it late? and aren't you tired, grandmother?"

"I shall sleep better after," she responded, gently.

She then began to review the past; her own long unhappiness, Robert's silence, her uncertainty as to his fate, and the after hopelessness, made greater by Ian's conduct. In low, kind words she spoke of his coming and the renewal of her hopes, coupled with fear also that he might not fit in with his new life, and—she could say it now—do something unbearable. Well, he had done nothing unworthy of their name; had acted, on the whole, sensibly; and she had not been greatly surprised at certain little oddnesses, such as the tent in the grounds, an impossible deer-hunt, and some unusual village charities and innovations on the estate. Nor did she object to Brillon, though he had sometimes thrown servants'-hall into disorder, and had caused the stablemen and the footmen to fight. His ear-rings and hair were startling, but they were not important.

Gaston had been admired by the hunting-field,—of which they were glad, for it was a test of popularity. She saw that most people liked him. Lord Dunfolly and Admiral Highburn were enthusiastic. For her own part, she was proud and grateful. She could enjoy every grain of comfort he gave them; and she was thankful to make up to Robert's son what Robert himself had lost—poor boy—poor boy!

Her feelings were deep, strong, and sincere. Her grandson had come, strong, individual, considerate, and had moved the tender courses of her nature. At this moment Gaston had his first deep feeling of responsibility.

"My dear," she said at last, "people in our position have important duties. Here is a large estate. Am I not clear? You will never be quite part of this life till you bring a wife here. That will give you a sense of responsibility. You will wake up to many things then. Will you not marry? There is Delia Gasgoyne. Your grandfather and I would be so glad! She is worthy in every way, and she likes you. She is a good girl. She has never frittered her heart away; and she would make you proud of her."

She reached out an anxious hand, and touched his shoulder. His eyes were playing with the pattern of the carpet; but he slowly raised them to hers, and looked for a moment without speaking. Suddenly, in spite of himself, he laughed—laughed outright, but not loudly.

Marriage? Yes, here was the touchstone. Marry a girl whose family had been notable for hundreds of years? For the moment he did not remember his own family. This was one of the times when he was only conscious that he had savage blood, together with a strain of New World French, and that his life had mostly been a range of adventure and common toil. This

new position was his right, but there were times when it seemed to him that he was an impostor; others, when he felt himself master of it all, when he even had a sense of superiority,—why he could not tell; but life in this old land of tradition and history had not its due picturesqueness. To his grandmother's proposal there shot up in him the thought that for him this was absurd. He to pace the world beside this fine queenly creature,—Delia Gasgoyne—carrying on the traditions of the Belwards! Was it, was it possible?

"Pardon me," he said at last gently, as he saw Lady Belward shrink and then look curiously at him, "something struck me, and I couldn't help it!"

"Was what I said at all ludicrous?"

"Oh no; you said what was natural for you to say, and I thought what was natural for me to think, at first blush."

"There is something wrong," she urged fearfully. "Is there any reason why you cannot marry? Gaston,"—she trembled towards him,—"you have not deceived us—you are not married?"

"My wife is dead, as I told you," he answered gravely, musingly.

"Tell me: there is no woman who has a claim on you?"

"None that I know of—not one! My follies have not run that way."

"Thank God! Then there is no reason why you should not marry. Oh, when I look at you I am proud, I am glad that I live! You bring my youth, my son back; and I long for a time when I may clasp your child in my arms, and know that Robert's heritage will go on and on, and that there will be made up to him, somehow, all that he lost. Listen: I am an old, crippled, suffering woman; I shall soon have done with all this coming and going, and I speak to you out of the wisdom of sorrow. Had Robert married, all would have gone well. He did not: he got into trouble, then came Ian's hand in it all; and you know the end. I fear for you, I do indeed. You will have sore temptations. Marry—marry soon, and make us happy."

He was quiet enough now. He had seen the grotesque image, now he was facing the thing behind it.

"Would it please you so very much?" he said, resting a hand gently on hers.

"I wish to see a child of yours in my arms, dear."

"And the woman you have chosen is Delia Gasgoyne?"

"The choice is for you; but you seem to like each other, and we care for her."

He sat thinking for a time, then he got up, and said slowly:

"It shall be so, if Miss Gasgoyne will have me. And I hope it may turn out as you wish."

Then he stooped and kissed her on the cheek. The proud woman, who had unbent little in her lifetime, whose eyes had looked out so coldly on the world, who felt for her son Ian an almost impossible aversion, drew down his head and kissed it.

"Indian and all?" he asked, with a quaint bitterness.

"Everything, my dear!" she answered. "God bless you! Good-night!"

A few moments after, Gaston went to the library. He heard the voices of Sir William and his uncle. He knocked and entered. Ian, with exaggerated courtesy, rose. Gaston, with easy coolness, begged him to sit, lit a cigar, and himself sat.

"My father has been feeding me with raw truths, Cadet," said his uncle; "and I've been eating them unseasoned. We have not been, nor are likely to be, a happy family, unless in your saturnian reign we learn to say, *Pax vobiscum*—do you know Latin? For I'm told the money-bags and the stately pile are for you. You are to beget children before the Lord, and sit in the seat of Justice: 'tis for me to confer honour on you all by my genius!"

Gaston sat very still, and, when the speech was ended, said tentatively:

"Why rob yourself?"

"In honouring you all?"

"No, sir; in not yourself having 'a saturnian reign'!"

"You are generous."

"No: I came here to ask for a home, for what was mine through my father. I ask, and want, nothing more—not even to beget children before the Lord!"

"How mellow the tongue! Well, Cadet, I am not going to quarrel. Here we are with my father. See, I am willing to be friends. But you mustn't expect that I will not chasten your proud spirit now and then. That you need it, this morning bears witness."

Sir William glanced from one to the other curiously. He was cold and calm, and looked worn. He had had a trying half-hour with his son, and it had told on him.

Gaston at once said to his grandfather:

"Of this morning, sir, I will tell you. I——"

Ian interrupted him.

"No, no; that is between us. Let us not worry my father."

Sir William smiled ironically.

"Your solicitude is refreshing, Ian."

"Late fruit is the sweetest, sir."

Presently Sir William asked Gaston the result of the talk with Lady Belward. Gaston frankly said that he was ready to do as they wished. Sir William

then said they had chosen this time because Ian was there, and it was better to have all open and understood.

Ian laughed.

"Taming the barbarian! How seriously you all take it! I am the jester for the King. In the days of the flood I'll bring the olive leaf. You are all in the wash of sentiment: you'll come to the wicked uncle one day for common sense. But, never mind, Cadet; we are to be friends. Yes, really. I do not fear for my heritage, and you'll need a helping hand one of these days. Besides, you are an interesting fellow. So, if you will put up with my acid tongue, there's no reason why we shouldn't hit it off."

To Sir William's great astonishment, Ian held out his hand with a genial smile, which was tolerably honest, for his indulgent nature was capable of as great geniality as incapable of high moral conceptions. Then, he had before his eye, "Monmouth" and "The King of Ys."

Gaston took his hand, and said:

"I have no wish to be an enemy."

Sir William rose, looking at them both. He could not understand Ian's attitude, and he distrusted. Yet peace was better than war. Ian's truce was also based on a belief that Gaston would make skittles of things.

A little while afterwards Gaston sat in his room,

turning over events in his mind. Time and again his thoughts returned to the one thing—marriage. That marriage with his Esquimaux wife had been in one sense none at all, for the end was sure from the beginning. It was in keeping with his youth, the circumstances, the life, it had no responsibilities. But this? To become an integral part of the life—the English country gentleman; to be reduced, diluted, to the needs of the convention, and no more? Let him think of the details:—a justice of the peace; to sit on a board of directors; to be, perhaps, Master of the Hounds; to unite with the Bishop in restoring the cathedral; to make an address at the annual flower-show. His wife to open bazaars, give tennis-parties, and be patron to the clergy; himself at last, no doubt, to go into Parliament; to feel the petty, or serious, responsibilities of a husband and a landlord. Monotony, extreme decorum, civility to the world; endless politeness to his wife; with boys at Eton and girls somewhere else;—and the kind of man he must be to do his duty in all and to all!

It seemed impossible. He rose and paced the floor. Never till this moment had the full picture of his new life come close. He felt stifled. He put on a cap, and, descending the stairs, went out into the courtyard and walked about, the cool air refreshing him. Gradually there settled upon him a stoic acceptance of the conditions. But would it last?

He stood still and looked at the pile of buildings before him; then he turned towards the little church close by, whose spire and roof could be seen above the wall. He waved his hand, as when within it on the day of his coming, and said with irony: "Now for the marriage-linen, Sir Gaston!"

He heard a low knocking at the gate. He listened. Yes, there was no mistake. He went to it, and asked quietly:

"Who is there?"

There was no reply. Still the knocking went on. He quietly opened the gate, and threw it back. A figure in white stepped through and slowly passed him. It was Alice Wingfield. He spoke to her. She did not answer. He went close to her and saw that she was asleep!

She was making for the entrance-door. He took her hand gently, and led her into a side-door, and on into the ball-room. She moved towards a window through which the moonlight streamed, and sat on a cushioned bench beneath it. It was the spot where he had seen her at the dance. She leaned forward, looking into space, as she did at him then. He moved and got in her line of vision.

The picture was weird. She wore a soft white chamber-gown, her hair hung loose on her shoulders, her pale face cowled in it. The look was inexpressibly sad. Over her fell dim, coloured lights from the

stained-glass windows; and shadowy ancestors looked silently down from the armour-hung walls.

To Gaston, collected as he was, it gave an ominous feeling. Why did she come here even in her sleep? What did that look mean? He gazed intently into her eyes.

All at once her voice came low and broken, and a sob followed the words:

"Gaston, my brother, my brother!"

He stood for a moment stunned, gazing helplessly at her passive figure.

"Gaston, my brother!" he repeated to himself.

Then the painful matter dawned upon him. This girl, the granddaughter of the rector of the parish, was his father's daughter—his own sister! He had a sudden spring of new affection—unfelt for those other relations, his by the rights of the law and the gospel. The pathos of the thing caught him in the throat—for her how pitiful, how unhappy! He was sure that, somehow, she had only come to know of it since the afternoon. Then there had been so different a look in her face!

One thing was clear: he had no right to this secret, and it must be for now as if it had never been. He came to her, and took her hand. She rose. He led her from the room, out into the courtyard, and from there through the gate into the road.

All was still. They passed over to the rectory.

Just inside the gate, Gaston saw a figure issue from the house, and come quickly towards them. It was the rector, excited, anxious.

Gaston motioned silence, and pointed to her. Then he briefly whispered how she had come. The clergyman said that he had felt uneasy about her, had gone to her room, and was just issuing in search of her. Gaston resigned her, softly advised not waking her, and bade the clergyman good-night.

But presently he turned, touched the arm of the old man, and said meaningly:

"I know."

The rector's voice shook as he replied:

"You have not spoken to her?"

"No."

"You will not speak of it?"

"No."

"Unless I should die, and she should wish it?"

"Always as she wishes."

They parted, and Gaston returned to the Court.

CHAPTER VIII.

HE ANSWERS AN AWKWARD QUESTION.

THE next morning Brillon brought a note from Ian Belward, which said that he was starting, and asked Gaston to be sure and come to Paris. The note was carelessly friendly. After reading it, he lay thinking. Presently he chanced to see Jacques look intently at him.

"Well, Brillon, what is it?" he asked genially.

Jacques had come on better than Gaston had hoped for, but the light play of his nature was gone—he was grave, almost melancholy; and, in his way, as notable as his master. Their life in London had changed him much. A valet in St. James' Street was not a hunting comrade on the Coppermine River. Often when Jacques was left alone he stood at the window looking out on the gay traffic, scarcely stirring; his eyes slow, brooding. Occasionally, standing so, he would make the sacred gesture. One who heard him swear now and then, in a calm, deliberate way—at the cook and the porter,—would have thought the matters in strange contrast. But his religion was a central habit, followed as mechanically as his appetite

or the folding of his master's clothes. Besides, like most woodsmen, he was superstitious. Gaston was kind with him, keeping, however, a firm hand till his manner had become informed by the new duties. Jacques' greatest pleasure was his early morning visits to the stables. Here were Saracen and Jim the broncho—sleek, savage, playful. But he touched the highest point of his London experience when they rode in the Park.

In this Gaston remained singular. He rode always with Jacques. Perhaps he wished to preserve one possible relic of the old life, perhaps he liked this touch of drama; or both. It created notice, criticism, but he was superior to that. Time and again people asked him to ride, but he always pleaded another engagement. He would then be seen with Jacques *plus* Jacques' ear-rings and the wonderful hair, riding grandly in the Row. Jacques' eyes sparkled and a snatch of song came to his lips at these times.

No figures in the Park were so striking. There was nothing bizarre, but Gaston had a distinguished look, and women who had felt his hand at their waists in the dance the night before, now knew him, somehow, at a grave distance. Though Gaston did not say it to himself, these were the hours when he really was with the old life—lived it again—prairie, savannah, ice-plain, alkali desert. When, dismounting, the horses were taken and they went up the stairs, Gaston

would softly lay his whip across Jacques' shoulders without speaking. This was their only ritual of camaraderie, and neglect of it would have fretted the half-breed. Never had man such a servant. No matter at what hour Gaston returned, he found Jacques waiting; and when he woke he found him ready, as now, on this morning, after a strange night.

"What is it, Jacques?" he repeated.

The old name! Jacques shivered a little with pleasure. Presently he broke out with:

"Monsieur, when do we go back?"

"Go back where?"

"To the North, monsieur."

"What's in your noddle now, Brillon?"

The impatient return to "Brillon" cut Jacques like a whip.

"Monsieur," he suddenly said, his face glowing, his hands opening nervously, "we have eat, we have drunk, we have had the dance and the great music here: Is it enough? Sometimes as you sleep you call out, and you toss to the strokes of the tower-clock. When we lie on the Plains of Yath from sunset to sunrise, you never stir then. You remember when we sleep on the ledge of the Voshti mountain—so narrow that we were tied together? Well, we were as babes in blankets. In the Prairie of the Ten Stars your fingers were on the trigger firm as a bolt; here I have seen them shake with the coffee-cup. Monsieur,

you have seen: Is it enough? You have lived here: Is it like the old lodge and the long trail?"

Gaston sat up in bed, looked in the mirror opposite, ran his fingers through his hair, regarded his hands, turning them over, and then, with sharp impatience, said:

"Go to hell!"

The little man's face flushed to his hair; he sucked in the air with a gasp. Without a word, he went to the dressing-table, poured out the shaving-water, threw a towel over his arm, and turned to come to the bed; but, all at once, he sidled back, put down the water, and furtively drew a sleeve across his eyes.

Gaston saw, and something suddenly burned in him. He dropped his eyes, slid out of bed, into his dressing-gown, and sat down.

Jacques made ready. He was not prepared to have Gaston catch him by the shoulders with a nervous grip, search his eyes, and say:

"You damned little fool! I'm not worth it!"

Jacques' face shone.

"Every great man has his fool—*alors!*" was the happy reply.

"Jacques," Gaston presently said, "what's on your mind?"

"I saw—last night, monsieur," he said.

"You saw what?"

"I saw you in the courtyard with the lady."

Gaston was now very grave.

"Did you recognise her?"

"No: she moved all as a spirit."

"Jacques, that matter is between you and me. I'm going to tell you, though, two things; and——where's your string of beads?"

Jacques drew out his rosary.

"That's all right. Mum as Manitou! She was asleep; she is my sister. And that is all, till there's need for you to know more!"

In this new confidence Jacques was content. The life was a gilded mess, but he could endure it now.

Three days passed. During that time Gaston was up to town twice; lunched at Lady Dargan's, and dined at Lord Dunfolly's. For his grandfather, who was indisposed, he was induced to preside at a political meeting in the interest of a wealthy local brewer, who confidently expected the seat, and, through gifts to the party, a knighthood. Before the meeting, in the gush of—as he put it—"kindred aims," he laid a finger familiarly in Gaston's button-hole. Jacques, who was present, smiled, for he knew every change in his master's face, and he saw a glitter in his eye. He remembered when they two were in trouble with a gang of river-drivers, and one did this same thing rudely; how Gaston looked down, and said, with a devilish softness: "Take it away!" And immediately after the man did so.

Mr. Sylvester Gregory Babbs, in a similar position, heard a voice say down at him, with a curious obliqueness:

"If you please!"

The keenest edge of it was lost on the flaring brewer, but his fingers dropped, and he twisted his heavy watch-chain uneasily. The meeting began. Gaston in a few formal words, unconventional in idea, introduced Mr. Babbs as "a gentleman whose name was a household word in the county, who would carry into Parliament the civic responsibility shown in his private life, who would render his party a support likely to fulfil its purpose."

When he sat down, Captain Maudsley said:

"That's a trifle vague, Belward."

"How can one treat him with importance?"

"He's the sort that makes a noise one way or another."

"Yes. Obituary: 'At his residence in Babbslow Square, yesterday, Sir S. G. Babbs, M. P., member of the London County Council. Sir S. G. Babbs, it will be remembered, gave £100,000 to build a home for the propagation of Vice, and——"

"That's droll!"

"Why not Vice? 'Twould be just the same in his mind. He doesn't give from a sense of moral duty. Not he; he's a *bungowawen!*"

"What is that?"

"That's Indian. You buy a lot of Indian or half-breed loafers with beaver-skins and rum, go to the Mount of the Burning Arrows, and these fellows dance round you and call you one of the lost race, the Mighty Men of the Kimash Hills. And they'll do that while the rum lasts. Meanwhile you get to think yourself a devil of a swell—you and the gods! . . . And now we had better listen to this *bungowawen*, hadn't we?"

The room was full, and on the platform were gentlemen come to support Sir William Belward. They were interested to see how Gaston would carry it off.

Mr. Babbs' speech was like a thousand others by the same kind of man. More speeches—some opposing—followed, and at last came the chairman to close the meeting. He addressed himself chiefly to a bunch of farmers, artisans, and labouring-men near. After some good-natured raillery at political meetings in general, the bigotry of party, the difficulty in getting the wheat from the chaff, and some incisive thrusts at those who promised the moon and gave a green cheese, who spent their time in berating their opponents, he said:

"There's a game that sailors play on board ship—men-o'-war and sailing-ships mostly. I never could quite understand it, nor could any officers ever tell me—the fo'castle for the men and the quarter-deck for the officers, and what's English to one is Greek to

the other! Well, this was all I could see in the game. They sat about, sometimes talking, sometimes not. All at once a chap would rise and say, 'Allow me to speak, me noble lord,' and follow this by hitting some one of the party wherever the blow got in easiest—on the head, anywhere! [Laughter.] Then he would sit down seriously, and someone else spoke to his noble lordship. Nobody got angry at the knocks, and Heaven only knows what it was all about. That is much the way with politics, when it is played fair. But here is what I want particularly to say: We are not all born the same, nor can we live the same. One man is born a brute, and another a good sort; one a liar, and one an honest man; one has brains, and the other hasn't. Now, I've lived where, as they say, one man is as good as another. But he isn't, there or here. A weak man can't run with a strong. We have heard to-night a lot of talk for something and against something. It is over. Are you sure you have got what was meant clear in your mind? [Laughter, and 'Blowed if we 'ave!'] Very well; do not worry about that. We have been playing a game of, 'Allow me to speak, me noble lord!' And who is going to help you to get the most out of your country and your life isn't easy to know. But we can get hold of a few clear ideas, and measure things against them. I know and have talked with a good many of you here ['That's so! That's so!'], and you know my

ideas pretty well—that they are honest at least, and that I have seen the countries where freedom is 'on the job,' as they say. Now, don't put your faith in men and in a party that cry, 'We will make all things new,' to the tune of, 'We are a band of brothers.' Trust in one that says, 'You cannot undo the centuries. Take off the roof, remove a wall, let in the air, throw out a wing, but leave the old foundations.' And that is the real difference between the other party and mine; and these political games of ours come to that chiefly."

Presently he called for the hands of the meeting. They were given for Mr. Babbs.

Suddenly a man's strong, arid voice came from the crowd:

"'Allow me to speak, me noble lord!' [Great laughter. Then a pause.] Where's my old chum, Jock Lawson?"

The audience stilled. Gaston's face went grave. He replied, in a firm, clear voice:

"In Heaven, my man. You'll never see him more!"

There was silence for a moment, a murmur, then a faint burst of applause. Presently John Cawley, the landlord of "The Whisk o' Barley," made towards Gaston. Gaston greeted him, and inquired after his wife. He was told that she was very ill, and had sent her husband to beg Gaston to come. Gas-

ton had dreaded this hour, though he knew it would come one day. A woman on a deathbed has a right to ask for and get the truth. He had forborne telling her of her son; and she, whenever she had seen him, had contented herself with asking general questions, dreading in her heart that Jock had died a dreadful or shameful death, or else this gentleman would, voluntarily, say more. But, herself on her way out of the world, as she feared, wished the truth, whatever it might be.

Gaston told Cawley that he would drive over at once, and then asked who it was had called out at him. A drunken, poaching fellow, he was told, who in all the years since Jock had gone, had never passed the inn without stopping to say, "Where's my old chum, Jock Lawson?" In the past he and Jock had been in more than one scrape together. He had learned from Mrs. Cawley that Gaston had known Jock in Canada.

When Cawley had gone, Gaston turned to the other gentlemen present.

"An original speech, upon my word, Belward!" said Captain Maudsley.

Mr. Warren Gasgoyne came.

"You are expected to lunch or something to-morrow, Belward, you remember? Devil of a speech that! But, if you will 'allow me to speak, me noble lord,' you are the rankest Conservative of us all."

"Don't you know that the easiest constitutional step is from a republic to an autocracy, and *vice versâ?*"

"I don't know it, and I don't know how you do it."

"Do what?"

"Make them think as you do."

He waved his hand to the departing crowd.

"I don't. I try to think as they do. I am always in touch with the primitive mind."

"You ought to do great things here, Belward," said the other seriously. "You have the trick; and we need wisdom at Westminster."

"Don't be mistaken; I am only adaptable. There's frank confession!"

At this point Mr. Babbs came up and said good-night in a large, self-conscious way. Gaston hoped that his campaign would not be wasted, and the fluffy gentleman retired. When he got out of earshot in the shadows, he turned and shook his fist towards Gaston, saying, "Half-breed upstart!" Then he refreshed his spirits by swearing at his coachman.

Gaston and Jacques drove quickly over to "The Whisk o' Barley." Gaston was now intent to tell the whole truth. He wished that he had done it before; but his motives had been good—it was not to save himself. Yet he shrank. Presently he thought:

"What is the matter with me? Before I came

here, if I had an idea I stuck to it, and didn't have any nonsense when I knew I was right. I am getting sensitive—the thing I find everywhere in this country: fear of feeling or giving pain; as if the bad tooth out isn't better than the bad tooth in! When I really get sentimental I'll fold my Arab tent—so help me, ye seventy Gods of Yath!"

A little while after he was at Mrs. Cawley's bed, the landlord handing him a glass of hot grog, Jock's mother eying him feverishly from the quilt. Gaston quietly felt her wrist, counting the pulse-beats; then told Cawley to wet a cloth and hand it to him. He put it gently on the woman's head. The eyes of the woman followed him anxiously. He sat down again, and in response to her questioning gaze, began the story of Jock's life as he knew it.

Cawley stood leaning on the footboard; the woman's face was cowled in the quilt with hungry eyes; and Gaston's voice went on in a low monotone, to the ticking of the great clock in the next room. Gaston watched her face, and there came to him like an inspiration little things Jock did, which would mean more to his mother than large adventures. Her lips moved now and again, even a smile flickered. At last Gaston came to his father's own death and the years that followed; then the events in Labrador.

He approached this with unusual delicacy: it needed bravery to look into the mother's eyes, and

tell the story. He did not know how dramatically he told it—how he etched it without a waste word. When he came to that scene in the Fort,—the three men sitting, targets for his bullets,—he softened the details greatly. He did not tell it as he told it at the Court, but the simpler, sparser language made it tragically clear. There was no sound from the bed, none from the footboard, but he heard a door open and shut without, and footsteps somewhere near.

How he put the body in the tree, and prayed over it and left it there, was all told; and then he paused. He turned a little sick as he saw the white face before him. She drew herself up, her fingers caught away the night-dress at her throat; she stared hard at him for a moment, and then, with a wild, moaning voice, cried out:

"You killed my boy! You killed my boy! You killed my boy!"

Gaston was about to take her hand, when he heard a shuffle and a rush behind him. He rose, turned swiftly, saw a bottle swinging, threw up his hand . . . and fell backwards against the bed.

The woman caught his bleeding head to her breast, and hugged it.

"My Jock! my poor boy!" she cried in delirium now.

Cawley had thrown his arms about the struggling, drunken assailant—Jock's poaching friend.

The mother now called out to the pinioned man, as she had done to Gaston:

"You have killed my boy!"

She kissed Gaston's bloody face.

A messenger was soon on the way to Ridley Court, and in a little upper room Jacques was caring for his master.

CHAPTER IX.

HE FINDS NEW SPONSORS.

GASTON lay for many days at "The Whisk o' Barley." During that time the inn was not open to customers. The woman also for two days hung at the point of death, and then rallied. She remembered the events of the painful night, and often asked after Gaston. Somehow, her horror of her son's death at his hands was met by the injury done him now. She vaguely felt that there had been justice and punishment. She knew that in the room at Labrador Gaston Belward had been scarcely less mad than her son.

Gaston, as soon as he became conscious, said that his assailant must be got out of the way of the police, and to that end bade Jacques send for Mr. Warren Gasgoyne. Mr. Gasgoyne and Sir William arrived at the same time, but Gaston was unconscious again. Jacques, however, told them what his master's wishes were, and they were carried out; Jock's friend secretly left England forever. Sir William and Mr. Gasgoyne got the whole tale from the landlord, whom they asked to say nothing publicly.

Lady Belward drove down each day, and sat beside him for a couple of hours—silent, solicitous, smoothing his pillow or his wasting hand. The brain had been injured, and recovery could not be immediate. Hovey the housekeeper had so begged to be installed as nurse, that her wish was granted, and she was with him night and day. Now she shook her head at him sadly, now talked in broken sentences to herself, now bustled about silently, a tyrant to the other servants sent down from the Court. Every day also the head-groom and the huntsman came, and in the village Gaston's humble friends discussed the mystery, stoutly defending him when some one said it was "more nor gabble, that theer saying o' the poacher at the meetin'!"

But the landlord and his wife kept silence, the officers of the law took no action, and the town and country newspapers could do no more than speak of "A vicious assault upon the heir of Ridley Court." It had become the custom now to leave Ian out of that question. But the wonder died as all wonders do, and Gaston made his fight for health.

The day before he was removed to the Court, Mrs. Cawley was helped upstairs to see him. She was gaunt and hollow-eyed. Lady Belward and Mrs. Gasgoyne were present. The woman made her respects, and then stood at Gaston's bedside. He looked up with a painful smile.

"Do you forgive me?" he asked.—"I've almost paid!"

He touched his bandaged head.

"It ain't for mothers to forgi'e the *thing*," she replied, in a steady voice, "but I can forgi'e the *man*. 'Twere done i' madness—there beant the will workin' i' such. 'Twere a comfort that he'd a prayin' over un!"

Gaston took the gnarled fingers in his. It had never struck him how dreadful a thing it was,—so used had he been to death in many forms—till he had told the story to this mother.

"Mrs. Cawley," he said, "I can't make up to you what Jock would have been; but I can do for you in one way as much as Jock. This house is yours from to-day."

He drew a deed from the coverlet, and handed it to her. He had got it from Sir William that morning. The poor and the crude in mind can only understand an objective emotion, and the counters for these are this world's goods. Here was a balm in Gilead. The love of her child was real, but the consolation was so practical to Mrs. Cawley that the lips which might have cursed, said:

"Oh, sir, the wind do be fittin' the shore lamb! I' the last Judgen, I'll no speak agen 'ee. I be sore fretted harm come to 'ee."

At this Mrs. Gasgoyne rose, and in her bustling

way dismissed the grateful peasant, who fondled the deed and called eagerly down the stairs to her husband as she went.

Mrs. Gasgoyne then came back, sat down, and said:

"Now you needn't fret about *that* any longer—barbarian!" she added, shaking a finger. "Didn't I say that you would get into trouble? that you would set the country talking? Here you were, in the dead of night, telling ghost stories, and raking up your sins, with no cause whatever, instead of in your bed. You were to have lunched with us the next day—I had asked Lady Harriet to meet you, too!—and you didn't; and you have wretched patches where your hair ought to be. How can you promise that you'll not make a madder sensation some day?"

Gaston smiled up at her. Her fresh honesty, under the guise of banter, was always grateful to him. He shook his head, smiled, and said nothing.

She went on.

"I want a promise that you will do what your godfather and godmother will swear for you."

She acted on him like wine.

"Of course, anything. Who are my godfather and godmother?"

She looked him steadily, warmly in the eyes:

"Warren and myself."

Now he understood: his promise to his grandmother and grandfather. So, they had spoken! He

was sure that Mrs. Gasgoyne had objected. He knew that behind her playful treatment of the subject there was real scepticism of himself. It put him on his mettle, and yet he knew she read him deeper than anyone else, and flattered him least.

He put out his hand, and took hers.

"You take large responsibilities," he said, "but I will try and justify you—honestly, yes."

In her hearty way, she kissed him on the cheek.

"There!" she responded, "if you and Delia do make up your minds, see that you treat her well. And you are to come, just as soon as you are able, to stay at Peppingham. Delia, silly child, is anxious, and can't see why she mustn't call with me now.

In his room at the Court that night, Gaston inquired of Jacques about Alice Wingfield, and was told that on the day of the accident she had left with her grandfather for the Continent. He was not sorry. For his own sake he could have wished an understanding between them. But now he was on the way to marriage, and it was as well that there should be no new situations. The girl could not wish the thing known. There would be left him, in this case, to befriend her should it ever be needed. He remembered the spring of pleasure he felt when he first saw other faces like his father's—his grandfather's, his grand-

mother's. But this girl's was so different to him; having the tragedy of the lawless, that unconscious suffering stamped by the mother upon the child. There was, however, nothing to be done. He must wait.

Two days later Lady Dargan called to inquire after him. He was lying in his study with a book, and Lady Belward sent to ask him if he would care to see her and Lord Dargan's nephew, Cluny Vosse. Lady Belward did not come; Sir William brought them. Lady Dargan came softly to him, smiled more with her eyes than her lips, and told him how sorry she had been to hear of his illness. Some months before Gaston had met Cluny Vosse, who at once was his admirer. Gaston liked the youth. He was fresh, high-minded, extravagant, idle; but he had no vices, and no particular vanity save for his personal appearance. His face was ever radiant with health, shining with satisfaction. People liked him, and did not discount it by saying that he had nothing in him. Gaston liked him most because he was so wholly himself, without guile, beautifully honest.

Now Cluny sat down, tapped the crown of his hat, looked at him cheerily, and said:

"Got in a cracker, didn't he?"

Gaston nodded, amused.

"The fellows at Brook's had a talkee-talkee, and they'd twenty different stories. Of course it was rot.

We were all cut up though and hoped you'd pull through. Of course there couldn't be any doubt of that—you've been through too many, eh?"

Cluny always assumed that Gaston had had numberless tragical adventures which, if told, must make Dumas turn in his grave with envy.

Gaston smiled, and laid a hand upon the other's knee.

"I'm not shell-proof, Vosse, and it was rather a narrow squeak, I'm told. But I'm kept, you see, for a worse fate and a sadder."

"I say, Belward, you don't mean that? Your eyes go so queer sometimes, that a chap doesn't know what to think. You ought to live to a hundred. You'll have to. You've got it all——"

"Oh no, my boy, I haven't got anything." He waved his hand pleasantly towards his grandfather. "I'm on the knees of the gods merely."

Cluny turned on Sir William.

"It isn't any secret, is it, sir? He gets the lot, doesn't he?"

Sir William's occasional smile came.

"I fancy there's some condition about the plate, the pictures, and the title; but I do not suppose that matters meanwhile!"

He spoke half-musingly and with a little unconscious irony, and the boy, vaguely knowing that there was a cross-current somewhere, drifted.

"No, of course not; he can have fun enough without them, can't he?"

Lady Dargan here soothingly broke in, inquiring about Gaston's illness, and showing a tactful concern. But the nephew persisted:

"I say, Belward, Aunt Sophie was cut up no end when she heard of it. She wouldn't go out to dinner that night at Lord Dunfolly's, and of course I didn't go. And I wanted to; for Delia Gasgoyne was to be there, and she's ripping."

Lady Dargan, in spite of herself, blushed, but without confusion, and Gaston adroitly led the conversation otherwhere. Presently she said that they were to be at their villa in France during the late summer, and if he chanced to be abroad would he come? He said that he intended to visit his uncle in Paris, but that afterwards he would be glad to visit them for a short time.

She looked astonished.

"With your uncle Ian!"

"Yes. He is to show me art-life, and all that."

She looked troubled. He saw that she wished to say something.

"Yes, Lady Dargan?" he asked.

She spoke with fluttering seriousness.

"I asked you once to come to me if you ever needed a friend. I do not wait for that. I ask you not to go to your uncle."

"Why?"

He was thinking that, despite social artifice and worldliness, she was sentimental.

"Because there will be trouble. I can see it. You may trust a woman's instinct; and I know that man!"

He did not reply at once, but presently said:

"I fancy I must keep my promise."

"What is the book you are reading?" she said, changing the subject, for Sir William was listening.

He opened it, and smiled musingly.

"It is called *Affairs of Some Consequence in the Reign of Charles I.* In reading it I seemed to feel that it was incorrect, and my mind kept wandering away into patches of things—incidents, scenes, bits of talk—as I fancied they really were, not apocryphal or 'edited' as here."

"I say," said Cluny, "that's rum, isn't it?"

"For instance," Gaston continued, "this tale of King Charles and Buckingham." He read it. "Now here is the scene as I picture it." In quick, elliptical phrases he gave the tale from a different standpoint.

Sir William stared curiously at Gaston, then felt for some keys in his pocket. He got up and rang the bell. Gaston was still talking. He gave the keys to Falby with a whispered word. In a few moments Falby placed a small leather box beside Sir William, and retired at a nod. Sir William presently said:

"Where did you read those things?"

"I do not know that I ever read them."

"Did your father tell you them?"

"I do not remember so, though he may have."

"Did you ever see this box?"

"Never before."

"You do not know what is in it?"

"Not in the least."

"And you have never seen this key?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"It is very strange." He opened the box. "Now, here are private papers of Sir Gaston Belward, more than two hundred years old, found almost fifty years ago by myself in the office of our family solicitor. Listen."

He then began to read from the faded manuscript. A mysterious feeling pervaded the room. Once or twice Cluny gave a dry nervous kind of laugh. Much of what Gaston had said was here in stately old-fashioned language. At a certain point the MSS. ran:

"I drew back and said, 'As your grace will have it, then——'"

Here Gaston came to a sitting posture, and interrupted.

"Wait, wait!"

He rose, caught one of two swords that were crossed on the wall, and stood out.

"This is how it was. 'As your grace will have it,

then, to no waste of time!' We fell to. First he came carefully, and made strange feints, learned at King Louis' Court, to try my temper. But I had had these tricks of my cousin Secord, and I returned his sport upon him. Then he came swiftly, and forced me back upon the garden wall. I gave to him foot by foot, for he was uncommon swift and dexterous. He pinched me sorely once under the knee, and I returned him one upon the wrist, which sent a devilish fire into his eyes. At that his play became so delicate and confusing that I felt I should go dizzy if it stayed; so I tried the one great trick cousin Secord taught me, making to run him through, as a last effort. The thing went wrong, but checking off my blunder he blundered too,—out of sheer wonder, perhaps, at my bungling—and I disarmed him. So droll was it that I laughed outright, and he, as quick in humour as in temper, stood hand on hip, and presently came to a smile. With that my cousin Secord cried: 'The king! the king!' I got me up quickly——"

Here Gaston, who had in a kind of dream acted the whole scene, swayed with faintness, and Cluny caught him, saving him from a fall. Cluny's colour was all gone. Lady Dargan had sat dazed, and Sir William's face was anxious, puzzled.

A few hours later Sir William was alone with Gaston, who was recovered and cool.

"Gaston," he said, "I really do not understand

this faculty of memory, or whatever it is. Have you any idea how you come by it?"

"Have we any idea how life comes and goes, sir?"

"I confess not. I confess not, really."

"Well, I'm in the dark about it too; but I sometimes fancy that I'm mixed up with that other Gaston."

"It sounds fantastic."

"It is fantastic. Now, here is this manuscript, and here is a letter I wrote this morning. Put them together."

Sir William did so.

"The handwriting is singularly like."

"Well," continued Gaston, smiling whimsically, "suppose that I *am* Sir Gaston Belward, Baronet, who is thought to lie in the church yonder, the title is mine, isn't it?"

Sir William smiled also.

"The evidence is scarce enough to establish succession."

"But there would be no succession. A previous holder of the title isn't dead: *ergo*, the present holder has no right."

Gaston had shaded his eyes with his hand, and he was watching Sir William's face closely, out of curiosity chiefly. Sir William regarded the thing with hesitating humour.

"Well, well, suppose so. The property was in the

hands of a younger branch of the family then. There was no entail, as now."

"Wasn't there?" said Gaston enigmatically.

He was thinking of some phrases in a manuscript which he had found in this box.

"Perhaps where these papers came from there are others," he added.

Sir William lifted his eyebrows ironically.

"I hardly think so."

Gaston laughed, not wishing him to take the thing at all seriously. He continued airily:

"It would be amusing if the property went with the title after all, wouldn't it, sir?"

Sir William got to his feet and said testily:

"That should never be while I lived!"

"Of course not, sir."

Sir William saw the bull, and laughed, heartily for him.

They bade each other good-night.

"I'll have a look in the solicitor's office all the same," said Gaston to himself.

CHAPTER X.

HE COMES TO "THE WAKING OF THE FIRE."

A FEW days afterwards Gaston joined a small party at Peppingham. Without any accent life was made easy for him. He was alone much, and yet, to himself, he seemed to have enough of company.

The situation did not impose itself conspicuously. Delia gave him no especial reason to be vain. She had not an exceeding wit, but she had charm, and her talk was interesting to Gaston, who had come, for the first time, into somewhat intimate relations with an English girl. He was struck with her conventional delicacy and honour on one side, and the limitation of her ideas on the other. But with it all she had some slight touch of temperament which lifted her from the usual level. And just now her sprightliness was more marked than it had ever been.

Her great hour seemed come to her. She knew that there had been talk among the elders, and what was meant by Gaston's visit. Still, they were not much alone together. Even a woman with a tender strain for a man knows what will serve for her

ascendancy. Gaston saw her mostly with others: the graciousness of her disposition, the occasional flash of her mother's temper, and her sense of being superior to a situation—the gift of every well-bred English girl.

Cluny Vosse was also at the house, and his devotion was divided between Delia and Gaston. Cluny was a great favourite, and Agatha Gasgoyne, who had a wild sense of humour, egged him on with her sister, which gave Delia enough to do. At last Cluny, in a burst of confidence, declared that he meant to propose to Delia. Agatha then became serious, and said that Delia was at least four years older than himself, that he was just her—Agatha's—age, and that the other match would be very unsuitable. This put Cluny on Delia's defence, and he praised her youth, and hinted at his own elderliness. He had lived, he had seen It (Cluny called the world and all therein "It"), he was aged; he was in the large eye of experience; he had outlived the vices and the virtues of his time, which, told in his own naïve staccato phrases, made Agatha hug herself. She advised him to go and ask Mr. Belward's advice; begged him not to act until he had done so. And Cluny, who was blind as a bat when a woman mocked him, went to Gaston and said:

"See, old chap,—I know you don't mind my calling you that,—I've come for advice. Agatha said I'd better. A fellow comes to a time when he says,

'Here, I want a shop of my own,' doesn't he? He's seen It, he's had It all colours, he's ready for family duties, and the rest. That's so, isn't it?"

Gaston choked back a laugh, and, purposely putting himself on the wrong scent, said:

"And does Agatha agree?"

"Agatha? Come, Belward, that youngster! Agatha's only in on a sisterly-brotherly basis. Now, see: I've got a little load of £ s. d., and I'm to get more, especially if Uncle Dick keeps on thinking I am artless. Well, why shouldn't I marry?"

"No reason against it, if husband and father in you yearn for bibs and petticoats!"

"I say, Belward, don't laugh!"

"I never was more serious. Who is the girl?"

"She looks up to you as I do—of course that's natural; and if it comes off, no one'll have a jollier corner *chez nous*. It's Delia!"

"Delia? Delia who?"

"Why, Delia Gasgoyne. I haven't done the thing quite regular, I know. I ought to have gone to her people first; but they know all about me, and so does Delia, and I'm on the spot, and it wouldn't look well to be taking advantage of that with her father and mother—they'd feel bound to be hospitable! So I've just gone on my own tack, and I've come to Agatha and you. Agatha said, to ask you if I'd better speak to Delia now."

"My dear Cluny, are you very much in love?"

"That sounds religious, doesn't it—a kind of Non-conformist business? I think she's the very finest! and a fellow'd hold himself up, 'd be a deuce of a swell,—and, hang it all, I hate breakfasting alone!"

"Yes, yes, Cluny; but what about a pew in church, with regular attendance, and a justice of the peace, and little Cluny Vosses on the carpet?"

Cluny's face went crimson.

"I say, Belward, I've seen It all, of course; I know It backwards, and I'm not squeamish, but that sounds—flippant—that, with her!"

Gaston reached out and caught the boy's shoulder.

"Don't do it, Cluny. Spare yourself. It couldn't come off. Agatha knows that, I fancy. She is a little sportsman. I might let you go and speak; but I think my chances are better than yours, Cluny. Hadn't you better let me try first? Then, if I fail, your chances are still the same, eh?"

Cluny gasped. His warm face went pale, then shot to purple, and finally settled into a grey ruddiness.

"Belward," he said at last, "I didn't know; upon my soul, I didn't know, or I'd have cut off my head first!"

"My dear Cluny, you shall have your chance; but let me go first, I'm older."

"Belward, don't take me for a fool! Why, my trying what you go to do is like—is like——"

Cluny's similes failed to come.

"Like a fox and a deer on the same trail?"

"I don't understand that. Like a yeomanry steeplechase to Sandown—is that it? Belward, I'm sorry. Playing it so low on a chap you like!"

"Don't say a word, Cluny; and, believe me, you haven't yet seen all of It. There's plenty of time. When you really have had It, you will learn to say of a woman, not that she's the very finest, and that you hate breakfasting alone, but something that'll turn your hair white, or keep you looking forty when you're sixty."

That evening Gaston dressed with unusual care. When he entered the drawing-room, he looked as handsome as a man need in this world. His illness had refined his features and form, and touched off his cheerfulness with a fine melancholy. Delia glowed as she saw the admiring glances sent his way, but burned with anger when she also saw that he was to take in Lady Gravesend to dinner; for Lady Gravesend had spoken slightingly of Gaston—had, indeed, referred to his "nigger blood!" And now her mother had sent her in to dinner on his arm, she affable, too affable by a great deal. Had she heard the dry and subtle suggestion of Gaston's talk, she would, however, have justified her mother.

About half-past nine Delia was in the doorway, talking to one of the guests, who, at the call of some-

one else, suddenly left her. She heard a voice behind her.

"Will you not sing?"

She thrilled, and turned to say:

"What shall I sing, Mr. Belward?"

"The song I taught you the other day—'The Waking of the Fire.'"

"But I've never sung it before anybody."

"Do I not count?—But that's unfair! Believe me, you sing it very well."

She lifted her eyes to his:

"You do not pay compliments, and I believe you. Your 'very well' means much. If you say so, I will do my best."

"I say so. You are amenable.—Is that your mood to-night?" He smiled brightly.

Her eyes flashed with a sweet malice.

"I am not at all sure. It depends on how your command to sing is justified."

"You cannot help but sing well."

"Why?"

"Because I will help you—make you."

This startled her ever so little. Was there some fibre of cruelty in him? some evil in this influence he had over her? She shrank, and yet again she said that she would rather have his cruelty than another man's tenderness, so long as she knew that she had his—— She paused, and did not say the word. She

met his eyes steadily,—their concentration dazed her —and said almost coldly, her voice sounding far away:

"How, *make* me?"

"How fine! how proud!" he said to himself, then added: "I meant 'make' in the helpful sense. I know the song: I've heard it sung, I've sung it; I've taught you; my mind will act on yours, and you will sing it well."

"Won't you sing it yourself? Do, please."

"No; to-night I wish to hear you."

"Why?"

"I will tell you later. Can you play the accompaniment? If not, I——"

"Oh, will you? I could sing it then, I think. You played it so beautifully the other day—with all those strange chords."

He smiled.

"It is one of the few things that I can play. I always had a taste for music; and up in one of the forts there was an old melodeon, so I hammered away for years. I had to learn difficult things at the start, or none at all, or else those I improvised; and that's how I can play one or two of Beethoven's symphonies pretty well, and this song, and a few others, and go a cropper with a waltz. Will you come?"

They moved to the piano. No one at first noticed them. When he sat down, he said:

"You remember the words?"

"Yes, I learned them by heart."

"Good!"

He gently struck the chords. His gentleness had, however, a firmness, a deep persuasiveness, which drew every face like a call. A few chords waving, as it were, over the piano, and then he whispered:

"Now!"

"Oh! go on for a minute longer," she begged. "My throat feels dry all at once."

"Face away from the rest, towards me," he said gently.

She did so. His voice took a note softly, and held it. Presently her voice as softly joined it, his stopped, and hers went on:

"In the lodge of the Mother of Men,
In the land of Desire,
Are the embers of fire,
Are the ashes of those who return,
Who return to the world:
Who flame at the breath
Of the Mockers of Death.—
O Sweet, we will voyage again
To the camp of Love's fire,
Nevermore to return!"

"How am I doing?" she said at the end of this verse.

She really did not know—her voice seemed an endless distance away. But she felt the stillness in the drawing-room.

"Well!" he said. "Now for the other. Don't be afraid; let your voice, let yourself, go."

"I can't let myself go."

"Yes, you can: just swim with the music."

She did swim with it. Never before had Peppingham drawing-room heard a song like this; never before, never after, did any of Delia Gasgoyne's friends hear her sing as she did that night. And Lady Gravesend whispered for a week afterwards that Delia Gasgoyne sang a wild love song in the most abandoned way with that colonial Belward.—Really a song of the most violent sentiment!

There had been witchery in it all. For Gaston lifted the girl on the waves of his music, and did what he pleased with her, as she sang:

"O love, by the light of thine eye
We will fare oversea,
We will be
As the silver-winged herons that rest
By the shallows,
The shallows of sapphire stone;
No more shall we wander alone.
As the foam to the shore
Is my spirit to thine;
And God's serfs as they fly,—
The Mockers of Death—
They will breathe on the embers of fire:
We shall live by that breath,—
Sweet, thy heart to my heart,
As we journey afar,
No more, nevermore, to return!"

When the song was ended there was silence, then an eager murmur, and requests for more; but Gaston, still lengthening the close of the accompaniment, said quietly:

"No more. I wanted to hear you sing that song only."

He rose.

"I am so very hot!" she said.

"Come into the hall."

They passed into the long corridor, and walked up and down, for a time in silence.

"You felt that music?" he asked at last.

"As I never felt music before," she replied.

"Do you know why I asked you to sing it?"

"How should I know?"

"To see how far you could go with it."

"How far did I go?"

"As far as I expected."

"It was satisfactory?"

"Perfectly."

"But why—experiment—on me?"

"That I might see if you were not, after all, as much a barbarian as I."

"Am I?"

"No. That was myself singing as well as you. You did not enjoy it altogether, did you?"

"In a way, yes. But—shall I be honest?—I felt,

too, as if, somehow, it wasn't quite right;—so much—what shall I call it?"

"So much of old Adam and the Garden?—Sit down here for a moment, will you?"

She trembled a little, and sat.

"I want to speak plainly and honestly to you," he said, looking earnestly at her. "You know my history—about my wife who died in Labrador, and all the rest?"

"Yes, they have told me."

"Well, I have nothing to hide, I think; nothing more that you ought to know: though I've been a scamp one way and another."

"'That I ought to know?'" she repeated.

"Yes: for when a man asks a woman to be his wife, he should be prepared to open the cupboard of skeletons."

She was silent; her heart was beating so hard that it hurt her.

"I am going to ask you, Delia, to be my wife."

She was silent, and sat motionless, her hands clasped in her lap.

He went on:

"I don't know that you will be wise to accept me, but if you will take the risk——"

"Oh, Gaston! Gaston!" she said, and her hands fluttered towards his.

An hour later, he said to her, as they parted for the night:

"I hope, with all my heart, that you will never repent of it, dear."

"You can make me not repent of it. It rests with you, Gaston; indeed, indeed, all with you!"

"Poor girl!" he said, unconsciously, as he entered his room. He could not have told why he said it.

"Why will you always sit up for me, Brillon?" he asked a moment afterwards.

Jacques saw that something had occurred.

"I have nothing else to do, sir," he replied.

"Brillon," Gaston added presently, "we're in a devil of a scrape now."

"What shall we do, monsieur?"

"Did we ever turn tail?"

"Yes, from a prairie fire."

"Not always. I've ridden through."

"*Alors*, it's one chance in ten thousand!"

"There's a woman to be thought of—Jacques."

"There was that other time."

"Well, then?"

Presently Jacques said:

"Who is she, monsieur?"

Gaston did not answer. He was thinking hard.

Jacques said no more. The next morning early the guests knew who the woman was, and by noon Jacques also.

CHAPTER XI.

HE MAKES A GALLANT CONQUEST.

GASTON let himself drift. The game of love and marriage is exciting, the girl was affectionate and admiring, the world was genial, and all things came his way. Towards the end of the hunting-season Captain Maudsley had an accident. It would prevent him riding to hounds again, and at his suggestion, backed by Lord Dunfolly and Lord Dargan, Gaston became Master of the Hounds. His grandfather and great-grandfather had been Master of the Hounds before him. Hunting was a keen enjoyment—one outlet for wild life in him—and at the last meet of the year he rode in Captain Maudsley's place. They had a good run, and the taste of it remained with Gaston for many a day; he thought of it sometimes as he rode in the Park now every morning—with Delia and her mother!

Jacques and his broncho came no more, or if they did it was at unseasonable hours, and then to be often reprimanded (and twice arrested) for furious riding. Gaston had a bad moment when he told Jacques that

he need not come with him again. He did it casually, but, cool as he was, a cold sweat came on his cheek. He had to take a little brandy to steady himself—yet he had looked into menacing rifle-barrels more than once without a tremor. It was clear, on the face of it, that Delia and her mother should be his companions in the Park, and not this grave little half-breed; but, somehow, it got on his nerves. He hesitated for days before he could cast the die against Jacques. It had been the one open bond of the old life; yet the man was but a servant, and to be treated as such, and was, indeed, except on rarest occasions. If Delia had known that Gaston balanced the matter between her and Jacques, her indignation might perhaps have sent matters to a crisis. But Gaston did the only possible thing; and the weeks drifted on.

Happy? It was inexplicable even to himself that at times, when he left Delia, he said unconsciously:

"Well, it's a pity!"

But she was happy in her way. His dark, mysterious face with its background of abstraction, his unusual life, distinguished presence, and the fact that people of great note sought his conversation, all strengthened the bonds, and deepened her imagination; and imagination is at the root of much that passes for love. Gaston was approached at Lord Dargan's by the Premier himself. It was suggested that he should stand for a constituency in the Con-

servative interest. Lord Faramond, himself picturesque, acute, with a keen knowledge of character and a taste for originality, saw material for a useful supporter—fearless, independent, with a gift for saying ironical things, and some primitive and fundamental principles well digested.

Gaston, smiling, said that he would only be a buffalo fretting on a chain.

Lord Faramond replied:

"And why the chain?" He followed this up with: "It is but a case of playing lion-tamer down there. Have one little gift all your own, know when to impose it, and you have the pleasure of feeling that your fingers move a great machine, the greatest in the world—yes, the very greatest! There is Little Grapnel just vacant: the faithful Byng is dead. Come: if you will, I'll send my secretary to-morrow morning—eh?"

"You are not afraid of the buffalo, sir?"

Lord Faramond's fingers touched his arm, drummed it:

"My greatest need—one to roar as gently as the sucking-dove."

"But what if I, not knowing the rules of the game, should think myself on the corner of a veldt or in an Indian's tepee, and hit out?"

"You do not carry derringers?" He smiled.

"No; but——"

He glanced down at his arms.

"Well, well; *that* will come one day, perhaps!" Lord Faramond paused, abstracted, then added: "But not through you. Good-bye, then, good-bye. Little Grapnel in ten days!"

And it was so. Little Grapnel was Conservative. It was mostly a matter of nomination, and in two weeks Gaston, in a kind of dream, went down to Westminster, lunched with Lord Faramond, and was introduced to the House. The Ladies Gallery was full, for the matter was in all the papers, and a pretty sensation had been worked up one way and another.

That night, after dinner, Gaston rose to make his maiden speech on a bill dealing with an imminent social question. He was not an amateur. Time upon time he had addressed gatherings in the North, and had once stood at the bar of the Canadian Commons to plead the cause of the Half-breeds. He was pale, but firm, and looked striking. His eyes went slowly round the House, and he began in a low, clear, deliberate voice, which got attention at once. The first sentence was, however, a surprise to every one, and not the least to his own party, excepting Lord Faramond. He disclaimed detailed and accurate knowledge of the subject. He said this with an honesty which took away the breath of the House. In a quiet, easy tone he then referred to what had been previously said in the debate.

The first thing he did was to crumble away with a regretful kind of superiority the arguments of two Conservative speakers; to the sudden amusement of the Opposition, who presently cheered him. He looked up as though a little surprised, waited patiently, and went on. The iconoclasm proceeded. He had one or two fixed ideas in his mind, simple principles on social questions of which he had spoken to his leader, and he never wavered from the sight of them, though he had yet to state them. The Premier sat, head cocked, with an ironical smile at the cheering, but he was wondering whether, after all, his man was sure; whether he could stand this fire, and reverse his engine quite as he intended. One of the previous speakers was furious, came over and appealed to Lord Faramond, who merely said, "Wait."

Gaston kept on. The flippant amusement of the Opposition continued. Something, however, in his grim steadiness began to impress his own party as the other, while from the Ladies Gallery and the Strangers Gallery there came a low murmur of sympathy. His courage, his stone-cold strength, the disdain which was coming into his voice, impressed them, apart from his arguments or its bearing on the previous debate. The House heard that low murmur from the galleries, and looked up. Then there came a striking silence, for Gaston paused. He also looked to the galleries. As if in a dream—for his brain was working with

clear, painful power—he saw, not Delia nor her mother, nor Lady Dargan, but Alice Wingfield and her grandfather! He had a sting, a rush in his blood. He felt that none had an interest in him such as she: shamed, sorrowful, denied the compensating comfort which his brother's love might give her. Her face, looking through the carved barriers, pale, glowing, anxious, almost weird, seemed set to the bars of a cage.

Gaston turned upon the House, and flashed a glance at Lord Faramond. The Premier smiled. He began slowly to pit against his former startling admissions the testimony of his few principles, and to buttress them on every side with apposite observations, naïve, pungent. Presently there came a poignant edge to his trailing tones. After giving the subject new points of view, showing him to have studied Whitechapel as well as Kicking Horse Pass, he contended that no social problem could be solved by a bill so crudely radical, so impractical.

He was saying: "In the history of the British Parliament——" when some angry member cried out:

"Who coached you?"

Gaston's quick eye found the man.

"Once," he answered instantly, "one honourable gentleman asked that of another in King Charles' Parliament, and the reply then is mine—'You, sir!'"

"How?" returned the puzzled member.

Gaston smiled with amiable disdain:

"The spur of the honourable gentleman's necessity!"

The game was in his hands. Lord Faramond twisted a shoulder with satisfaction, tossed a whimsical look down the line of the Treasury Bench, and from that Bench came unusual applause.

"Where the devil did he get it?" queried a Minister.

"Out on the buffalo-trail!" replied Lord Faramond. "Good fellow!"

In the Ladies Gallery, Delia clasped her mother's hand with delight; in the Strangers Gallery, a man said softly: "Not so bad, Cadet!"

Alice Wingfield's face had a light of aching pleasure. "Gaston! Gaston!" she said, in a whisper heard only by her grandfather, who, sitting back, watched her affectionately, anxiously.

Gaston made his last effort in a comparison of the state of the English people now and before she became Cromwell's Commonwealth, and then incisively traced the social development onwards. It was the work of a man with a dramatic nature and a mathematical turn. He put the time, the manners, the movements, the men, as in a picture.

Presently he grew scornful. His words came hotly, like whip-lashes. He rose to force and power, though his voice was never loud, rather concentrated, resonant. It dropped suddenly to a tone of persua-

siveness and conciliation, and declaring that the bill would be merely vicious where it meant to be virtuous, ended with the question:

"Shall we burn the house to roast the pig?"

"That sounds American," said the member for Burton-Halsey, "but he hasn't an accent. Pig is vulgar though—vulgar."

"Make it Lamb—make it Lamb!" urged his neighbour.

Meanwhile both sides applauded. Maiden speeches like this were not common. A seat was empty—whether of purpose or not, who can say?—beside Lord Faramond. He caught Gaston's eye. Gaston came.

"Most excellent buffalo!" he said. "One day we will chain you—to the Treasury Bench."

Gaston smiled.

"You are thought prudent, sir!"

"Ah! an enemy hath said this!"

Gaston looked towards the Ladies Gallery. Delia's eyes were on him; Alice was gone.

A half-hour later he stood in the lobby, waiting for Mrs. Gasgoyne, Lady Dargan, and Delia to come. He had had congratulations in the House; he was having them now. Presently someone touched him on the arm.

"Not so bad, Cadet!"

Gaston turned and saw his uncle. They shook hands.

"You've a gift that way," Ian Belward continued, "but to what good? Bless you, the pot on the crackling thorns! Don't you find it all pretty hollow?"

Gaston was feeling reaction from the nervous work.

"It is exciting."

"Yes, but you'll never have it again as to-night. The place reeks with smugness, vanity, and drudgery. It's only the swells—Derby, Gladstone, and the few—who get any real sport out of it. I can show you much more amusing things."

"For instance?"

"'Hast thou forgotten me?' You hungered for Paris and Art and the joyous life. Well, I'm ready. I want you. Paris, too, is waiting, and a good cuisine in a cheery *ménage*. Sup with me at the Garrick, and I'll tell you. Come along. *Quis separabit?*"

"I have to wait for Mrs. Gasgoyne—and Delia."

"Delia! Delia! Goddess of proprieties, has it come to that!"

He saw a sudden glitter in Gaston's eyes, and changed his tone.

"Well, an' a man will he will, and he must be wished good-luck. So, good-luck to you! I'm sorry, though, for that cuisine in Paris, and the grand picnic at Fontainebleau, and Moban and Cérise. But it can't be helped!"

He eyed Gaston curiously. Gaston was not in the

least deceived. His uncle continued: "But you will have supper with me just the same?"

Gaston consented, and at this point the ladies appeared. He had a thrill of pleasure at hearing their praises, but, somehow, of all the fresh experiences he had had in England, this, the weightiest, left him least elated. He had now had it all: the reaction was begun, and he knew it!

"Well, Ian Belward, what mischief are you at now?" said Mrs. Gasgoyne.

"A picture merely, and to offer homage. How have you tamed our lion, and how sweetly does he roar! I feed him at my Club to-night."

"Ian Belward, you are never so wicked as when you ought most to be decent!—I wish I knew your place in this picture," she added brusquely.

"Merely a little corner at their fireside." He nodded towards Delia and Gaston.

"The man has sense, and Delia is my daughter!"

"Precisely why I wish a place in their affections."

"Why don't you marry one of the women you have—spoiled, and spend the rest of your time in living yourself down? You are getting old."

"For their own sakes, I don't. Put that to my credit. I'll have but one mistress only as the sand gets low. I've been true to her."

"You, true to anything!"

"The world has said so."

"Nonsense! You couldn't be."

"Visit my new picture in three months—my biggest thing. You will say my mistress fares well at my hands."

"Mere talk. I have seen your mistress, and before every picture I have thought of those women! A thing cannot be good at your price: so don't talk that sentimental stuff to me."

"Be original; you said that to me thirty years ago."

"I remember perfectly: that did not require much sense."

"No; you tossed it off, as it were. Yet I'd have made you a good husband. You are the most interesting woman I've ever met."

"The compliment is not remarkable. Now, Ian Belward, don't try to say clever things. And remember that I will have no mischief-making!"

"At thy command——"

"Oh! cease acting, and take Sophie to her carriage."

Two hours later, Delia Gasgoyne sat in her bedroom wondering at Gaston's abstraction during the drive home. Yet she had a proud elation at his success, and a happy tear came to her eye.

Meanwhile Gaston was supping with his uncle. Ian was in excellent spirits: brilliant, caustic, genial, suggestive. After a little while Gaston rose to the

temper of his host. Already the scene in the Commons was fading from him, and when Ian proposed Paris immediately, he did not demur. The season was nearly over, Ian said; very well, why remain? His attendance at the House? Well, it would soon be up for the session. Besides, the most effective thing he could do was to disappear for the time. Be unexpected—that was the key to notoriety. Delia Gasgoyne? Well, as Gaston had said, they were to meet in the Mediterranean in September; meanwhile a brief separation would be good for both. Last of all—he did not wish to press it—but there was a promise!

Gaston answered quietly, at last:

"I will redeem the promise."

"When?"

"Within thirty-six hours."

"That is, you will be at my studio in Paris within thirty-six hours from now?"

"That is it."

"Good! I shall start at eight to-morrow morning. You will bring your horse, Cadet?"

"Yes, and Brillon."

"He isn't necessary." Ian's brow clouded slightly.

"Absolutely necessary."

"A fantastic little beggar. You can get a better valet in France. Why have one at all? I don't, and I'm to have the title!"

"I shall not decline from Brillon on a Parisian valet. Besides, he comes as my good comrade."

"Goth! Goth! My friend the valet! Cadet, you're a wonderful fellow, but you'll never fit in quite."

"I don't wish to fit in; things must fit me."

Ian smiled to himself.

"He has tasted it all—it's not quite satisfying—revolution next! What a smash-up there'll be! The romantic, the barbaric overlaps. Well, I shall get my picture out of it, and the estate too."

Gaston toyed with his wine-glass, and was deep in thought. Strange to say, he was seeing two pictures. —The tomb of Sir Gaston in the little church at Ridley: A gipsy's van on the crest of a common, and a girl standing in the doorway.

CHAPTER XII.

HE STANDS BETWEEN TWO WORLDS.

THE next morning he went down to the family solicitor's office. He had done so, off and on, for weeks. He spent the time in looking through old family papers, fishing out ancient documents, partly out of curiosity, partly from an unaccountable presentiment. He had been there about an hour this morning when a clerk brought him a small box, which, he said, had been found inside another box belonging to the Belward-Staplings, a distant branch of the family. These had asked for certain ancient papers lately, and a search had been made, with this result. The little box was not locked, and the key was in it. How the accident occurred was not difficult to imagine. Generations ago there had probably been a conference of the two branches of the family, and the clerk had inadvertently locked the one box within the other. This particular box of the Belward-Staplings was not needed again. Gaston felt that here was something. These hours spent among old papers had given him strange sensations, had, on the

one hand, shown him his heritage; but had also filled him with the spirit of that bygone time. He had grown further away from the present. He had played his part as in a drama: his real life was in the distant past and out in the land of the heathen.

Now he took out a bundle of papers with broken seals, and wound with a faded tape. He turned the rich important parchments over in his hands. He saw his own name on the outside of one: "Sir Gaston Robert Belward." And there was added: "Bart." He laughed. Well, why not complete the reproduction? He was an M. P.—why not a Baronet? He knew how it was done. There were a hundred ways. Throw himself into the arbitration question between Canada and the United States: spend ten thousand pounds of—his grandfather's—money on an election? His reply to himself was cynical: the game was not worth the candle. What had he got out of it all? Money? Yes: and he enjoyed that—the power that it gave—thoroughly. The rest? He knew that it did not strike as deep as it ought: the family tradition, the social scheme—the girl.

"What a brute I am!" he said. "I'm never wholly of it. I either want to do as they did when George Villiers had his innings, or play the gipsy as I did so many years."

The gipsy! As he held the papers in his hand he thought as he had done last night, of the gipsy-van on

Ridley Common, and of—how well he remembered her name!—of Andrée.

He suddenly threw his head back, and laughed.

"My God, but it is droll! Last night, an English gentleman, an honourable member with the Treasury Bench in view; this morning an adventurer, a Romany. I itch for change. And why? Why? I have it all, yet I could pitch it away this moment for a wild night on the Slope, or a nigger hunt on the Rivas. Château-Léoville, Goulet, and Havanas at a bob?—Jove, I thirst for a swig of raw Bourbon and the bite of a penny Mexican! Games, Gaston, games! Why the devil did little Joe worry at being made 'move on'? I've got 'move on' in every pore: the Wandering Jew. Oh, a gentleman born am I! But the Romany sweats from every inch of you, Gaston Belward! What was it that sailor on the *Cyprian* said of the other?—'For every hair of him was rope-yarn, and every drop of blood Stockolm tar!'

He opened a paper. Immediately he was interested. Another; then, quickly, two more; and at last, getting to his feet with an exclamation, he held a document to the light, and read it through carefully. He was alone in the room. He calmly folded it up, put it in his pocket, placed the rest of the papers back, locked the box, and passing into the next room, gave it to the clerk. Then he went out, a curious smile on his face. He stopped presently on the pavement.

"But it wouldn't hold good, I fancy, after all these years. Yet Law is a queer business. Anyhow, I've got it."

An hour later he called on Mrs. Gasgoyne and Delia. Mrs. Gasgoyne was not at home. After a little while, Gaston, having listened to some extracts from the newspapers upon his "brilliant, powerful, caustic speech, infinite in promise of an important career," quietly told her that he was starting for Paris, and asked when they expected to go abroad in their yacht. Delia turned pale, and could not answer for a moment. Then she became very still, and as quietly answered that they expected to get away by the middle of August. He would join them? Yes, certainly, at Marseilles, or, perhaps, Gibraltar. Her manner, so well-controlled, though her features seemed to shrink all at once, if it did not deceive him, gave him the wish to say an affectionate thing. He took her hand and said it. She thanked him, then suddenly dropped her fingers on his shoulder, and murmured with infinite gentleness and pride:

"You will miss me; you ought to!"

He drew the hand down.

"I could not forget you, Delia," he said.

Her eyes came up quickly, and she looked steadily, wonderingly, at him.

"Was it necessary to say that?"

She was hurt—inexpressibly,—and she shrank. He saw that she misunderstood him; but he also saw that,

on the face of it, the phrase was not complimentary. His reply was deeply kind, effective. There was a pause—and the great moment for them both passed! Something ought to have happened. It did not. If she had had that touch of abandon shown when she sang "The Waking of the Fire," Gaston might, even at this moment, have broken his promise to his uncle; but, somehow, he knew himself slipping away from her. With the tenderness he felt, he still knew that he was acting; imitating, reproducing other, better, moments with her. He felt the disrespect to her, but it could not be helped—it could not be helped!

He said that he would call and say good-bye to her and Mrs. Gasgoyne at four o'clock. Then he left. He went to his chambers, gave Jacques instructions, did some writing, and returned at four. Mrs. Gasgoyne had not come back. She had telegraphed that she would not be in for lunch. There was nothing remarkable in Gaston's and Delia's farewell. She thought he looked worn, and ought to have change, showing in every word that she trusted him, and was anxious that he should be, as she put it gaily, "comfy." She was composed. The cleverest men are blind in the matter of a woman's affections; and Gaston was only a mere man, after all. He thought that she had gone about as far in the way of feeling as she could go.

Nevertheless, in his hansom, he frowned, and said:

"I oughtn't to go. But I'm choking here. I can't

play the game an hour longer without a change. I'll come back all right. I'll meet her in the Mediterranean, after my kick-up, and it'll be all O. K. Jacques and I will ride down through Spain to Gibraltar, and meet the *Kismet* there. I shall have got rid of this restlessness then, and I'll be glad enough to settle down, pose for throne and constitution, cultivate the olive branch, and have family prayers."

At eight o'clock he appeared at Ridley Court, and bade his grandfather and grandmother good-bye. They were full of pride, and showed their affection in indirect ways,—Sir William most by offering his opinion on the Bill and quoting Gaston frequently; Lady Belward, by saying that next year she would certainly go up to town—she had not done so for five years! They both agreed that a scamper on the Continent would now be good for him. At nine o'clock he passed the rectory, on his way, strange to note, to the church. There was one light burning, but it was not in the study nor in Alice's window. He supposed they had not returned. He paused and thought. If anything happened, she should know.—What should happen? He shook his head. He moved on to the church. The doors were unlocked. He went in, drew out a little pocket-lantern, lit it, and walked up the aisle.

"A sentimental business this: I don't know why I do it," he thought.

He stopped at the tomb of Sir Gaston Belward, put his hand on it, and stood looking at it.

"I wonder if there is anything in it?" he said aloud: "if he does influence me? if we've got anything to do with each other? What he did I seem to know somehow, more or less. A little dwarf up in my brain drops the nuts down now and then. Well, Sir Gaston Belward, what is going to be the end of all this? If we can reach across the centuries, why, good-night and good-bye to you! Good-bye!"

He turned and went down the aisle. At the door a voice, a whispering voice, floated to him:

"Good-bye!"

He stopped short and listened. All was still. He walked up the aisle, and listened again.—Nothing! He stood before the tomb, looking at it curiously. He was pale, but collected. He raised the light above his head, and looked towards the altar.—Nothing!

Then he went to the door again, and paused.—Nothing!

Outside he said:

"I'd stake my life I heard it!"

A few minutes afterwards, a girl rose up from behind the organ in the chancel, and felt her way outside. It was Alice Wingfield, who had gone to pray in the church. It was her good-bye that had floated down to Gaston.

CHAPTER XIII.

HE JOURNEYS AFAR.

THE newspapers gossiped. Where was the new member? His friends could not tell, further than that he had gone abroad. Lord Faramond did not know, but fetched out his lower lip knowingly.

"The fellow has instinct for the game," he said.

Sketches, portraits were in the daily and weekly journals, and one hardy journalist even gave an interview—which had never occurred. But Gaston remained a picturesque nine-days' figure, and then Parliament rose for the year.

Meanwhile he was in Paris, and every morning early he could be seen with Jacques riding up the Champs Elysée and out to the Bois de Boulogne. Every afternoon at three he sat for "Monmouth" or the "King of Ys" with his horse in his uncle's garden.

Ian Belward might have lived in a fashionable part; he preferred the Latin Quarter, with incursions into the other at fancy. Gaston lived for three days in the Boulevard Haussman, and then took apart-

ments, neither expensive nor fashionable, in a quiet street. He was surrounded by students and artists, a few great men and a host of small men: Collarossi's school here and Delacluse's there: models flitting in and out of the studios in his courtyard, who stared at him as he rode, and sought to gossip with Jacques —accomplished without great difficulty.

Jacques was transformed. A cheerful hue grew on his face. He had been an exile, he was now at home. His French tongue ran, now with words in the patois of Normandy, now of Brittany; and all with the accent of French Canada, an accent undisturbed by the changes and growths of France. He gossipped, but no word escaped him which threw any light on his master's history.

Soon, in the Latin quarter, they were as notable as they had been at Ridley Court or in London. On the Champs Elysée side people stared at the two: chiefly because of Gaston's splendid mount and Jacques' strange broncho. But they felt that they were at home. Gaston's French was not perfect, but it was enough for his needs. He got a taste of that freedom which he had handed over to the dungeons of convention two years before. He breathed. Everything interested him so much, that the life he had led in England seemed very distant.

He wrote to Delia, of course. His letters were brief, most interesting, not tenderly intimate, and not

daily. From the first they puzzled her a little, and continued to do so; but because her mother said, "What an impossible man!" she said, "Perfectly possible! Of course he was not like other men; he was a genius."

And the days went on.

Gaston little loved the purlieus of the Place de l'Opéra. One evening at a club in the Boulevard Malesherbes bored him. It was merely Anglo-American enjoyment, dashed with French drama. The Bois was more to his taste, for he could stretch his horse's legs; but every day he could be found before some simple café in Montparnasse, sipping vermouth, and watching the gay, light life about him. He sat up with delight to see an artist and his "Madame" returning from a journey in the country, seated upon sheaves of corn, quite unregarded by the world; doing as they listed with unabashed simplicity. He dined often at the little Hôtel St. Malo near the Gare Montparnasse, where the excellent Pelletier played the host, father, critic, patron, comrade,—often benefactor—to his *bons enfants*. He drank *vin ordinaire*, smoked caporal cigarettes, made friends, and was in all as a savage—or a much-travelled English gentleman.

His uncle Ian had introduced him here as at other places of the kind, and, whatever his ulterior object was, had an artist's pleasure at seeing a layman enjoy

the doings of Paris art life. Himself lived more luxuriously. In an avenue not far from the Luxembourg he had a small hôtel with a fine old-fashioned garden behind it, and here distinguished artists, musicians, actors, and actresses came at times.

The evening of Gaston's arrival he took him to a café and dined him, and afterwards to the Boullier—there, merely that he might see; but this place had nothing more than a passing interest for him. His mind had the poetry of a free, simple—even wild—life, but he had no instinct for vice in the name of amusement. But the later hours spent in the garden under the stars, the cheerful hum of the boulevards coming to them distantly, stung his veins like good wine. They sat and talked, with no word of England in it at all, Jacques near, listening.

Ian Belward was at his best: genial, entertaining, with the art of the man of no principles, no convictions, and a keen sense of life's sublime incongruities. Even Jacques, whose sense of humour had grown by long association with Gaston, enjoyed the piquant conversation. The next evening the same. About ten o'clock a few men dropped in: a sculptor, artists, and Meyerbeer an American newspaper correspondent —who, however, was not known as such to Gaston.

This evening Ian determined to make Gaston talk. To deepen a man's love for a thing, get him to talk of it to the eager listener—he passes from the nar-

rator to the advocate unconsciously. Gaston was not to talk of England, but of the North, of Canada, Mexico, the Lotos Isles. He did so picturesquely, yet simply too, in imperfect but sufficient French. But as he told of one striking incident in the Rockies, he heard Jacques make a quick expression of dissent. He smiled. He had made some mistake in detail. Now, Jacques had been in his young days in Quebec the village story-teller; one who, by inheritance or competency, becomes semi-officially a *raconteur* for the parish; filling in winter evenings, nourishing summer afternoons with tales, weird, childlike, daring.

Now Gaston turned and said to Jacques:

"Well, Brillon, I've forgotten, as you see; tell them how it was."

Two hours later when Jacques retired on some errand, amid ripe applause, Ian said:

"You've got an artist there, Cadet: that description of the fight with the loup garoo was as good as a thing from Victor Hugo. Hugo must have heard just such yarns, and spun them on the pattern. Upon my soul, it's excellent stuff. You've lived, you two."

Another night Ian Belward gave a dinner, at which were present an actress, a singer of some repute, the American journalist, and others. Something that was said sent Gaston's mind to the House

of Commons. Presently he saw himself in a ridiculous picture: a buffalo dragging the Treasury Bench about the Chamber; as one conjures things in an absurd dream. He laughed outright, at a moment when Mademoiselle Cérise was telling of a remarkable effect she produced one night in "Fédora," unpremeditated, inspired; and Mademoiselle Cérise, with smiling lips and eyes like daggers, called him a bear. This brought him to himself, and he swam with the enjoyment. He did enjoy it, but not as his uncle wished and hoped. Gaston did not respond eagerly to the charms of Mademoiselle Cérise and Madame Juliette.

Was Delia, then, so strong in the barbarian's mind? He could not think so, but Gaston had not shown yet, either for model, for daughter of joy, or for the mademoiselles of the stage any disposition to an amour or a *mésalliance:* either would be interesting and sufficient! Models went in and out of Ian's studio and the studios of others, and Gaston chatted with them at times; and once he felt the bare arm and bare breast of a girl as she sat for a nymph, and said in an interested way that her flesh was as firm and fine as a Tongan's. He even disputed with his uncle on the tints of her skin, on seeing him paint it in, showing a fine eye for colour. But there was nothing more; he was impressed, observant, interested,—that was all. His uncle began to wonder if

the Englishman was, after all, deeper in the grain than the savage. He contented himself with the belief that the most vigorous natures are the most difficult to rouse. Mademoiselle Cérise sang, with *chic* and abandon very fascinating to his own sensuous nature, a song with a charming air and sentiment. It was after a night at the opera when they had seen her in "Lucia," and the contrast, as she sang in his garden, softly lighted, showed her at the most attractive angles. She drifted from a sparkling chanson to the delicate pathos of a song of De Musset's.

Gaston responded to the artist; but to the woman —no! He had seen a new life, even in its abandon, polite, fresh. It amused him, but he could still turn to the remembrance of Delia without blushing, for he had come to this in the spirit of the idler, not the libertine.

Mademoiselle Cérise said to Ian at last:

"*Enfin*, is the man stone? As handsome as a leopard, too! *Voilà*, it is no matter!"

But she made another effort to interest him. It galled her that he did not fall at her feet as others had done. Even Ian had come there in his day, but she knew him too well. She had said to him at the time:

"You, monsieur? No, thank you. A week, a month, and then the brute in you would out. You make a woman fond, and then—a mat for your feet,

and your wicked smile, and savage English words to drive her to the vitriol or the Seine. *Et puis*, dear monsieur, accept my good friendship, nothing more. I will sing to you, dance to you, even pray for you—we poor sinners do that sometimes, and go on sinning; but, again, nothing more."

Ian admired her all the more for her refusal of him, and they had been good friends. He had told her of his nephew's coming, had hinted at his fortune, at his primitive soul, at the unconventional strain in him, even at marriage. She could not read his purpose, but she knew there was something, and answering him with a yes, had waited. Had Gaston have come to her feet she would probably have got at the truth somehow, and have worked in his favour,—the joy vice takes to side with virtue, at times—when it is at no personal sacrifice. But Gaston was superior in a grand way. He was simple, courteous, interested only. This stung her, and she would bring him to his knees, if she could. This night she had rung all the changes, and had done no more than get his frank applause. She became petulant in an airy exacting way. She asked him about his horse. This interested him. She wanted to see it. To-morrow? No, no, now! Perhaps to-morrow she would not care to; there was no joy in deliberate pleasure. Now—now—now! He laughed. Well, now, as she wished!

Jacques was called. She said to him:

"Come here, little comrade." Jacques came. "Look at me," she added. She fixed her eyes on him, and smiled. She was in the soft flare of the lights.

"Well," she said after a moment, "what do you think of me?"

Jacques was confused.

"Madame is beautiful."

"The eyes?" she urged.

"I have been to Gaspé, and west to Esquimault, and in England, but I have never seen such as those!" he said. Race and primitive man spoke there.

She laughed. "Come closer, comrade."

He did so. She suddenly rose, dropped her hands on his shoulders, and kissed his cheek.

"Now bring the horse, and I will kiss him too."

Did she think she could rouse Gaston by kissing his servant? Yet it did not disgust him. He knew it was a bit of acting, and it was well done. Besides, Jacques Brillon was not a mere servant, and he, too, had done well. She sat back and laughed lightly when Jacques was gone. Then she said: "The honest fellow!" and hummed an air:

"'The pretty coquette
Well she needs to be wise,
Though she strike to the heart
By a glance of her eyes.

For the daintiest bird
Is the sport of the storm,
And the rose fadeth most
When the bosom is warm.'"

In twenty minutes the gate of the garden opened, and Jacques appeared with Saracen. The horse's black skin glistened in the lights, and he tossed his head and champed his bit. Gaston rose. Mademoiselle Cérise sprang to her feet and ran forward. Jacques put out his hand to stop her, and Gaston caught her shoulder.

"He's wicked with strangers," Gaston said.

"*Chut!*" she rejoined, stepped quickly to the horse's head and, laughing, put out her hand to stroke him. Jacques caught the beast's nose, and stopped a lunge of the great white teeth.

"Enough, madame, he will kill you!"

"Yet I am beautiful—is it not so?"

"The poor beast is ver' blind."

"A pretty compliment!" she rejoined, yet angry at the beast.

Gaston came, took the animal's head in his hands, and whispered. Saracen became tranquil. Gaston beckoned to Mademoiselle Cérise. She came. He took her hand in his and put it at the horse's lips. The horse whinnied angrily at first, but permitted a caress from the actress' fingers.

"He does not make friends easily," said Gaston.

"Nor does his master."

Her eyes lifted to his, the lids drooping suggestively.

"But when the pact is made——!"

"Till death us do part?"

"Death or ruin."

"Death is better."

"That depends!"

"Ah! I understand," she said. "On—the woman?"

"Yes."

Then he became silent.

"Mount the horse," she urged.

Gaston sprang at one bound upon the horse's bare back. Saracen reared and wheeled.

"Splendid!" she said; then, presently: "Take me up with you."

He looked doubting for a moment, then whispered to the horse.

"Come quickly!" he said.

She came to the side of the horse. He stooped, caught her by the waist, and lifted her up. Saracen reared, but Gaston had him down in a moment.

Ian Belward suddenly called out:

"For God's sake, keep that pose for five minutes—only five!" He caught up some canvas. "Hold candles near them," he said to the others. They did so. With great swiftness he sketched in the strange pic-

ture. It looked weird, almost savage: Gaston's large form, his legs loose at the horse's side, the woman in her white drapery clinging to him.

In a little time the artist said:

"There; that will do. Ten such sittings and my 'King of Ys' will have its day with the world. I'd give two fortunes for the chance of it!"

The woman's heart had beat fast with Gaston's arm around her. He felt the thrill of the situation. Man, woman, and horse were as of a piece.

But Cérise knew, when Gaston let her to the ground again, that she had not conquered.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH THE PAST IS REPEATED.

NEXT morning Gaston was visited by Meyerbeer the American journalist, of whose profession he was still ignorant. He saw him only as a man of raw vigour of opinion, crude manners, and heavy temperament. He had not been friendly to him at night, and he was surprised at the morning visit. The hour was such that Gaston must ask him to breakfast. The two were soon at the table of the Hôtel St. Malo. Meyerbeer sniffed the air when he saw the place. The linen was ordinary, the rooms small; but all—he did not take this into account—irreproachably clean. The walls were covered with pictures; some taken for unpaid debts, gifts from students since risen to fame or gone into the outer darkness,—to young artists' eyes, the sordid money-making world,—and had there been lost; from a great artist or two who remembered the days of his youth and the good host who had seen many little colonies of artists come and go.

They sat down to the table, which was soon filled with students and artists. Then Meyerbeer began to

see, not only an interesting thing, but "copy." He was, in fact, preparing a certain article which, as he said to himself, would "make 'em sit up" in London and New York. He had found out Gaston's history, had read his speech in the Commons, had seen paragraphs speculating as to where he was; and now he, Salem Meyerbeer, would tell them what the wild fellow was doing. The Bullier, the cafés in the Latin Quarter, apartments in a humble street, dining for one-franc-fifty, supping with actresses, posing for the King of Ys with that actress in his arms—all excellent in their way. But now there was needed an entanglement, intrigue, amour, and then America should shriek at his picture of one of the British aristocracy, and a gentleman of the Commons, "on the loose," as he put it.

He would head it:

"ARISTOCRAT, POLITICIAN, LIBERTINE!"

Then, under that he would put:

"CAN THE ETHIOPIAN CHANGE HIS SKIN, OR THE LEOPARD HIS SPOTS?" *Jer.* xi. 23.

The morality of such a thing? Morality only had to do with ruining a girl's name, or robbery. How did it concern this?

So Mr. Meyerbeer kept his ears open. Presently one of the students said to Bagshot, a young artist:

"How does the dompteuse come on?"

"Oh! I think it's *chic* enough. She's magnificent. The colour of her skin against the lions was splendid to-day: a regular rich gold with a sweet stain of red —like a leaf of maize in September. There's never been such a Una. I've got my chance; and if I don't pull it off,

'Wrap me up in my tarpaulin jacket,
And say a poor buffer lies low!'"

"Get the jacket ready," put in a young Frenchman, sneering.

The Englishman's jaw hardened, but he replied coolly:

"What do you know about it?"

"I know enough. The Comte Ploaré visits her."

"How the devil does that concern my painting her?"

There was iron in Bagshot's voice.

"Who says you are *painting* her?"

The insult was conspicuous. Gaston quickly interposed. His clear strong voice rang down the table:

"Will you let me come and see your canvas some day soon, Mr. Bagshot? I remember your 'A Passion in the Desert,' at the Academy this year. A fine thing: the leopard was free and strong. As an Englishman, I am proud to meet you."

The young Frenchman stared. The quarrel had passed to a new and unexpected quarter. Gaston's large, solid body, strong face, and penetrating eyes

were not to be sneered out of sight. The Frenchman, an envious, disappointed artist, had had in his mind a bloodless duel, to give a fillip to an unacquired fame. He had, however, been drinking. He flung an insolent glance to meet Gaston's steady look, and said:

"The cock crows of his dunghill!"

Gaston looked at the landlord, then got up calmly and walked down the table. The Frenchman, expecting he knew not what, sprang to his feet, snatching up a knife; but Gaston was on him like a hawk, pinioning his arms and lifting him off the ground, binding his legs too, all so tight that the Frenchman squealed for breath.

"Monsieur," said Gaston to the landlord, "from the door or the window?"

Pelletier was pale. It was in some respects a quarrel of races. For, French and English at the tables had got up and were eying each other. As to the immediate outcome of the quarrel, there could be no doubt. The English and Americans could break the others to pieces; but neither wished that. The landlord decided the matter:

"Drop him from this window."

He pushed a shutter back, and Gaston dropped the fellow on the hard pavement—a matter of five feet. The Frenchman got up raging, and made for the door; but this time he was met by Pelletier, who gave

him his hat, and bade him come no more. There was applause from both English and French. The journalist chuckled—another column!

Gaston had acted with coolness and common-sense; and when he sat down and began talking of the Englishman's picture again as if nothing had happened, the others followed, and the dinner went on cheerfully.

Presently another young English painter entered, and listened to the conversation, which Gaston brought back to Una and the lions. It was his way to force things to his liking, if possible; and he wanted to hear about the woman—why, he did not ask himself. The new arrival, Fancourt by name, kept looking at him quizzically. Gaston presently said that he would visit the menagerie and see this famous dompteuse that afternoon.

"She's a brick!" said Bagshot. "I was in debt, a year behind with my Pelletier here, and it took all I got for 'The Passion in the Desert' to square up. I'd nothing to go on with. I spent my last sou in visiting the menagerie. There I got an idea. I went to her, told her how I was fixed, and begged her to give me a chance. By Jingo! she brought the water to my eyes. Some think she's a bit of a devil; but she can be a devil of a saint, that's all I've got to say!"

"Zoug-Zoug's responsible for the devil," said Fancourt to Bagshot.

"Shut up, Fan," rejoined Bagshot, hurriedly, and then whispered to him quickly.

Fancourt sent self-conscious glances down the table towards Gaston; and then a young American, newly come to Paris, said:

"Who's Zoug-Zoug, and what's Zoug-Zoug?"

"It's milk for babes, youngster," answered Bagshot quickly, and changed the conversation.

Gaston saw something strange in the little incident; but he presently forgot it for many a day, and then remembered it for many a day, when the wheel had spun through a wild arc.

When they rose from the table, Meyerbeer went to Bagshot, and said:

"Say, who's Zoug-Zoug, anyway?"

Bagshot coolly replied:

"I'm acting for another paper. What price?"

"Fifty dollars," in a low voice, eagerly.

Bagshot meditated.

"H'm, fifty dollars! Two hundred and fifty francs, or thereabouts. Beggarly!"

"A hundred, then."

Bagshot got to his feet, lighting a cigarette.

"Want to have a pretty story against a woman, and to smutch a man, do you? Well, I'm hard up; I don't mind gossip among ourselves; but sell the stuff to you—I'll see you damned first!"

"This was said sufficiently loud; and after that,

Meyerbeer could not ask Fancourt, so he departed with Gaston, who courteously dismissed him, to his astonishment and regret, for he had determined to visit the menagerie with his quarry.

Gaston went to his apartments, and cheerily summoned Jacques.

"Now, little man, for a holiday! The menagerie: lions, leopards, and a grand dompteuse; and afterwards dinner with me at the Café Blanche. I want a blow-out of lions and that sort. I'd like to be a lion-tamer myself for a month, or as long as might be."

He caught Jacques by the shoulders—he had not done so since that memorable day at Ridley Court.

"See, Jacques, we'll do this every year.—Six months in England, and three months on the Continent,—in your France, if you like,—and three months in the out-of-the-wayest place, where there'll be big game. Hidalgos for six months, Goths for the rest."

A half-hour later they were in the menagerie. They sat near the doors where the performers entered. For a long time they watched the performance with delight, clapping and calling bravo like boys. Presently the famous dompteuse entered,—Mademoiselle Victorine,—passing just below Gaston. He looked down, interested, at the supple, lithe creature making for the cages of lions in the amphitheatre. The figure struck him as familiar. Presently the girl turned, throwing a glance round the theatre. He caught the

flash of the dark, piercing eyes, the luminous look, the face unpainted—in its own natural colour: neither hot health nor paleness, but a thing to bear the light of day.

"Andrée the gipsy!" he said in a low tone.

In less than two years this! Here was fame. A wanderer, an Ishmael then, her handful of household goods and her father in the grasp of the Law: to-day, Mademoiselle Victorine, queen of animal-tamers! And her name associated with the Comte Ploaré!

With the Comte Ploaré? Had it come to that? He remembered the look in her face when he bade her good-bye. Impossible! Then, immediately he laughed. Why impossible? And why should he bother his head about it? People of this sort: Mademoiselle Cérise, Madame Juliette, Mademoiselle Victorine—what were they to him, or to themselves?

There flashed through his brain three pictures: when he stood by the bedside of the old dying Esquimaux in Labrador, and took a girl's hand in his; when among the flowers at Peppingham he heard Delia say: "Oh, Gaston! Gaston!" and Alice's face at midnight in the moonlit window at Ridley Court.

How strange this figure—spangled, gaudy, standing among her lions—seemed by these. To think of her, his veins thumping thus, was an insult to all three: to Delia, one unpardonable. And yet he could

not take his eyes off her. Her performance was splendid. He was interested, speculative. She certainly had flown high; for, again, why should not a dompteuse be a decent woman? And here were money, fame of a kind, and an occupation that sent his blood bounding. A dompteur!—He had tamed moose, and young mountain lions, and a catamount, and had had mad hours with pumas and arctic bears; and he could understand how even he might easily pass from M. P. to dompteur. It was not intellectual, but it was power of a kind; and it was decent, and healthy, and infinitely better than playing the Jew in business, or keeping a tavern, or "shaving" notes, and all that. Truly, the woman was to be admired, for she was earning an honest living; and no doubt they lied when they named her with the Comte Ploaré. He kept coming back to that—Comte Ploaré! Why could they not leave these women alone? Did they think none of them virtuous? He would stake his life that Andrée—he would call her that—was as straight as the sun.

"What do you think of her, Jacques?" he said suddenly.

"It is grand. *Mon Dieu*, she is wonderful—and a face all fire!"

Presently she came out of the cage, followed by two great lions. She walked round the ring, a hand on the head of each: one growling, the other purring

against her, with a ponderous kind of affection. She talked to them as they went, giving occasionally a deep purring sound like their own. Her talk never ceased. She looked at the audience, but only as in a dream. Her mind was all with the animals. There was something splendid in it: she, herself, was a noble animal; and she seemed entirely in place where she was. The lions were fond of her, and she of them; but the first part of her performance had shown that they could be capricious. A lion's love is but a lion's love after all—and hers likewise, no doubt! The three seemed as one in their beauty, the woman superbly superior.

Meyerbeer, in a far corner, was still on the trail of his sensation. He thought that he might get an article out of it—with the help of Comte Ploaré and Zoug-Zoug. Who was Zoug-Zoug? He exulted in her picturesqueness, and he determined to lie in wait. He thought it a pity that Comte Ploaré was not an Englishman or an American; but it couldn't be helped. Yes, she was, as he said to himself, "a stunner!" Meanwhile he watched Gaston, noted his intense interest.

Presently the girl stopped beside the cage. A chariot was brought out, and the two lions were harnessed to it. Then she called out another larger lion, which came unwillingly at first. She spoke sharply, and then struck him. He growled, but came on.

Then she spoke softly to him, and made that peculiar purr, soft and rich. Now he responded, walked round her, coming closer, till his body made a half-circle about her, and his head was at her knees. She dropped her hand on it. Great applause rang through the building. This play had been quite accidental. But there lay one secret of the girl's success. She was original; she depended greatly on the power of the moment for her best effects, and they came at unexpected times.

It was at this instant that, glancing round the theatre in acknowledgment of the applause, her eyes rested mechanically on Gaston's box. There was generally someone important in that box: from a foreign prince to a young gentleman whose proudest moment was to take off his hat in the Bois to the queen of a lawless court. She had tired of being introduced to princes. What could it mean to her? And for the young bloods, whose greatest regret was that they could not send forth a daughter of joy into the Champs Elysée in her carriage, she had ever sent them about their business. She had no corner of pardon for them. She kissed her lions, she hugged the lion's cub that rode back and forth with her to the menagerie day by day—her companion in her modest apartments; but sell one of these kisses to a young gentleman of Paris, whose ambition was to master all the vices, and then let the vices master him!—she had not

come to that, though, as she said in some bitter moments, she had come far.

The Comte Ploaré—there was nothing in that. A blasé man of the world, who had found it all not worth the bothering about, neither code nor people,—he saw in this rich impetuous nature a new range of emotions, a brief return to the time when he tasted an open strong life in Algiers, in Tahiti. And he would laugh at the world by marrying her—yes, actually marrying her, the dompteuse! Accident had let him render her a service, not unimportant, once at Versailles, and he had been so courteous and considerate afterwards, that she had let him see her occasionally, but never yet alone. He soon saw that an amour was impossible. At last he spoke of marriage. She shook her head. She ought to have been grateful, but she was not. Why should she be? She did not know why he wished to marry her; but, whatever the reason, he was selfish. Well, she would be selfish. She did not care for him. If she married him, it would be because she was selfish: because of position, ease; for protection in this shameless Paris; and for a home, she who had been a wanderer since her birth.

It was mere bargaining. But at last her free, independent nature revolted. No: she had had enough of the chain, and the loveless hand of man, for three months that were burned into her brain—no more! If ever she loved—all! But not the right for Comte

Ploaré to demand the affection she gave her lions freely.

The manager of the menagerie had tried for her affections, had offered a price for her friendship; and failing, had become as good a friend as such a man could be. She even visited his wife occasionally, and gave gifts to his children; and the mother trusted her and told her her trials. And so the thing went on, and the people talked.

As we said, she turned her eyes to Gaston's box. Instantly they became riveted, and then a deep flush swept slowly up her face and burned into her splendid hair. Meyerbeer was watching through his opera-glasses. He gave an exclamation of delight:

"By the holy smoke, here's something!" he said aloud.

For an instant Gaston and the girl looked at each other intently. He made a slight sign of recognition with his hand, and then she turned away, gone a little pale now. She stood looking at her lions, as if trying to recollect herself. The lion at her feet helped her. He had a change of temper, and, possibly fretting under inaction, growled. At once she summoned him to get into the chariot. He hesitated, but did so. She put the reins in his paws and took her place behind. Then a robe of purple and ermine was thrown over her shoulders by an attendant; she gave a sharp command, and the lions came round the ring, to wild

applause. Even a Parisian audience had never seen anything like this. It was amusing too; for the coachman-lion was evidently disgusted with his task, and growled in a helpless kind of way.

As they passed Gaston's box, they were very near. The girl threw one swift glance; but her face was well controlled now. She heard, however, a whispered word come to her:

"Andrée!"

A few moments afterwards she retired, and the performance was in other and less remarkable hands. Presently the manager himself came, and said that Mademoiselle Victorine would be glad to see Monsieur Belward if he so wished. Gaston left Jacques, and went.

Meyerbeer noticed the move, and determined to see the meeting if possible. There was something in it, he was sure. He would invent an excuse, and make his way behind.

Gaston and the manager were in the latter's rooms waiting for Victorine. Presently a messenger came, saying that Monsieur Belward would find Mademoiselle in her dressing-room. Thither Gaston went, accompanied by the manager, who, however, left him at the door, nodding good-naturedly to Victorine, and inwardly praying that here was no danger to his business: Victorine was a source of great profit! Yet he had failed himself, and all others had failed in win-

ning her,—why should this man succeed, if that was his purpose?

There was present an elderly, dark-featured Frenchwoman, who was always with Victorine, vigilant, protective, loving her as her own daughter.

"Monsieur!" said Andrée, a warm colour in her cheek.

Gaston shook her hand cordially, and laughed.

"Mademoiselle—Andrée?"

He looked inquiringly.

"Yes, to you," she said.

"You have it all your own way now—isn't it so?"

"With the lions, yes. Please sit down. This is my dear keeper," she said, touching the woman's shoulder. Then, to the woman: "Annette, you have heard me speak of this gentleman?"

The woman nodded, and modestly touched Gaston's outstretched hand.

"Monsieur was kind once to my dear Mademoiselle," she said.

Gaston cheerily smiled:

"Nothing, nothing, upon my word!"

Presently he continued:

"Your father, what of him?"

She sighed and shivered a little.

"He died in Auvergne three months after you saw him."

"And you?" He waved a hand towards the menagerie.

"It is a long story," she answered, not meeting his eyes. "I hated the Romany life. I became an artist's model; tired of that,"—her voice went quickly here,—"joined a travelling menagerie, and became what I am. That in brief."

"You have done well," he said admiringly, his face glowing.

"I am a successful dompteuse," she replied.

She then asked him who was his companion in the box. He told her. She insisted on sending for Jacques. Meanwhile they talked of her profession, of the animals. She grew eloquent. Jacques arrived, and suddenly remembered Andrée—stammered, was put at his ease, and dropped into talk with Annette. Gaston fell into reminiscences of wild game, and talked intelligently, acutely of her work. He must wait, she said, until the performance closed, and then she would show him the animals as a happy family. Thus a half-hour went by.

Meanwhile, Meyerbeer had asked the manager to take him to Mademoiselle; but was told that Victorine never gave information to journalists, and would not be interviewed. Besides, she had a visitor. Yes, Meyerbeer knew it—Mr. Gaston Belward; but that did not matter. The manager thought it did matter. Then, with an idea of the future, Meyerbeer asked to

be shown the menagerie thoroughly,—he would write it up for England and America.

And so it happened that there were two sets of people inspecting the menagerie after the performance. Andrée let a dozen of the animals out—lions, leopards, a tiger, and a bear,—and they gambolled round her playfully, sometimes quarrelling with each other, but brought up smartly by her voice and a little whip, which she always carried—the only sign of professional life about her, though there was ever a dagger hid in her dress. For the rest, she looked a splendid gipsy.

Gaston suddenly asked if he might visit her. At the moment she was playing with the young tiger. She paused, was silent, preoccupied. The tiger, feeling neglected, caught her hand with its paw. Gaston whipped out his handkerchief, and staunched the blood. She wrapped the handkerchief quickly round her hand, and then, recovering herself, ordered the animals back into their cages. They trotted away, and the attendant locked them up. Meanwhile Jacques had picked up and handed to Gaston a letter, dropped when he drew out his handkerchief. It was one received two days before from Delia Gasgoyne. He had a pang of confusion, and hastily put it into his pocket.

Up to this time there had been no confusion in his mind. He was going back to do his duty; to marry

the girl, union with whom would be an honour; to take his place in his kingdom. He had had no minute's doubt of that. It was necessary, and it should be done. The girl? Did he not admire her, honour her, care for her? Why, then, this confusion?

Andrée said to him that he might come the next morning for breakfast. She said it just as the manager and Meyerbeer passed her. Meyerbeer heard it, and saw the look in the faces of both: in hers, bewildered, warm, penetrating; in Gaston's, eager, glowing, bold, with a distant kind of trouble.

Here was a thickening plot for Paul Pry. He hugged himself. But who was Zoug-Zoug? If he could but get at that! He asked the manager, who said he did not know. He asked a dozen men that evening, but none knew. He would ask Ian Belward. What a fool not to have thought of him at first! He knew all the gossip of Paris, and was always communicative—but was he, after all? He remembered now that the painter had a way of talking at discretion: he had never got any really good material from him. But he would try him in this.

So, as Gaston and Jacques travelled down the Boulevard Montparnasse, Meyerbeer was not far behind.

The journalist found Ian Belward at home, in a cynical indolent mood.

"Wherefore Meyerbeer?" he said, as he motioned

the other to a chair, and pushed over vermouth and cigarettes.

"To ask a question."

"One question? Come, that's penance! Aren't you lying as usual?"

"No; one only. I've got the rest of it."

"Got the rest of it, eh? Nasty mess you've got, whatever it is, I'll be bound. What a nice mob you press fellows are—wholesale scavengers!"

"That's all right.—This vermouth is good enough! Well, will you answer my question?"

"Possibly, if it's not personal. But Lord knows where your insolence may run! You may ask if I'll introduce you to a decent London club!"

Meyerbeer flushed at last.

"You're rubbing it in," he said angrily.

He did wish to be introduced to a good London club.

"The question isn't personal, I guess. It's this: Who's Zoug-Zoug?"

Smoke had come trailing out of Belward's nose, his head thrown back, his eyes on the ceiling. It stopped, and came out of his mouth in one long, straight whiff. Then the painter brought his head to a natural position slowly, and looking with a furtive nonchalance at Meyerbeer, said:

"Who is what?"

"Who's Zoug-Zoug?"

"That is your one solitary question, is it?"

"That's it."

"Very well. Now, I'll be scavenger. What is the story? Who is the woman?—for you've got a woman in it, that's certain!"

"Will you tell me, then, whether you know Zoug-Zoug?"

"Yes."

"The woman is Mademoiselle Victorine, the dompteuse."

"Oh! I've not seen her yet. She burst upon Paris while I was away. Now, straight: no lies: who are the others?"

Meyerbeer hesitated; for, of course, he did not wish to speak of Gaston at this stage in the game. But he said:

"Comte Ploaré—and Zoug-Zoug."

"Why don't you tell me the truth?"

"I do. Now, who is Zoug-Zoug?"

"Find out!"

"You said you'd tell me."

"No. I said I'd tell you if I knew Zoug-Zoug. I do."

"That's all you'll tell me?"

"That's all. And see, scavenger, take my advice and let Zoug-Zoug alone. He's a man of influence; and he's possessed of a devil. He'll make you sorry, if you meddle with him!"

He rose, and Meyerbeer did the same, saying:

"You'd better tell me."

"Now, don't bother me. Drink your vermouth, take that bundle of cigarettes, and hunt Zoug-Zoug elsewhere. If you find him, let me know. Good-bye!"

Meyerbeer went out furious. The treatment had been too heroic.

"I'll give a sweet savour to your family name!" he said with an oath, as he shook his fist at the closed door.

Ian Belward sat back and looked at the ceiling reflectively.

"H'm!" he said at last. "What the devil does this mean? Which one is it? Not Andrée, surely not Andrée! Yet I wasn't called Zoug-Zoug before that. It was Bagshot's insolent inspiration at Auvergne. Well, well!"

He got up, drew over a portfolio of sketches, took out two or three, put them in a row against a divan, sat down, and looked at them half quizzically.

"It was rough on you, Andrée; but you were hard to please, and I am constant to but one. Yet, begad, you had solid virtues; and I wish, for your sake, I had been a different kind of fellow. Refused money, too; didn't threaten; and left between the days. Well, well, we'll meet again some time, and then we'll be good friends, no doubt. So it goes!"

He turned away from the sketches and picked up some illustrated newspapers. In one was a portrait. He looked at it, then at the sketches again and again.

"There's a resemblance," he said. "But no, it's not possible. Andrée—Mademoiselle Victorine! That would be amusing. I'd go to-morrow and see, if I weren't off to Fontainebleau. But there's no hurry: when I come back will do."

CHAPTER XV.

WHEREIN IS SEEN THE OLD ADAM AND THE GARDEN.

At Ridley Court and Peppingham all was serene to the eye. Letters had come to the Court at least once every two weeks from Gaston, and the minds of the Baronet and his wife were at ease. They even went so far as to hope that he would influence his uncle; for it was clear to them both that whatever Gaston's faults were, they were agreeably different from Ian's. His fame and promise were sweet to their nostrils. Indeed, the young man had brought the wife and husband nearer than they had been since Robert vanished over-sea. Each had blamed the other in an indefinite, secret way; but here was Robert's son, on whom they could lavish—as they did—their affection, long since forfeited by Ian. Finally, one day, after a little burst of thanksgiving, on getting an excellent letter from Gaston, telling of his simple, amusing life in Paris, Sir William sent him one thousand pounds, begging him to buy a small yacht, or to do what he pleased with it.

"A very remarkable man, my dear," Sir William

said, as he enclosed the cheque. "Excellent wisdom —excellent!"

"Who could have guessed that he knew so much about the poor and the East End, and all those social facts and figures?" Lady Belward answered complacently.

"An unusual mind, with a singular taste for history, and yet a deep observation of the present. I don't know when and how he does it. I really do not know."

"It is nice to think that Lord Faramond approves of him!"

"Most noticeable. And we have not been a Parliamentary family since the first Charles' time. And then it was a Sir Gaston! Singular—quite singular! Coincidences of looks and character. Nature plays strange games. Reproduction—reproduction!"

"The *Pall Mall Gazette* says that Lord Faramond thinks he may yet reach the Treasury Bench."

Sir William was abstracted. He was thinking of that afternoon in Gaston's bedroom, when his grandson had acted, before Lady Dargan and Cluny Vosse, Sir Gaston's scene with Buckingham.

"Really, most mysterious, most unaccountable. But it's one of the virtues of having a descent. When it is most needed, it counts, it counts."

"Against the half-breed mother!" Lady Belward added.

"Quite so, against the—was it Cree or Blackfoot? I've heard him speak of both, but which is in him I do not remember."

"It is very painful; but, poor fellow, it is not his fault, and we ought to be content."

"Indeed, it gives him great originality. Our old families need refreshing now and then."

"Ah, yes, I said so to Mrs. Gasgoyne the other day, and she replied that the refreshment might prove intoxicating. Reiné was always rude."

Truth is, Mrs. Gasgoyne was not quite satisfied. That very day she said to her husband:

"You men always stand by each other; but I know you, and you know that I know."

"'Thou knowest the secrets of our hearts'; well, then, you know how we love you. So, be merciful."

"Nonsense, Warren! I tell you he oughtn't to have gone when he did. He has the wild man in him, and I am not satisfied."

"What do you want—me to play the spy?"

"Warren, you're a fool! What do I want? I want the first of September to come quickly, that we may have him with us. With Delia he must go straight. She influences him, he admires her—which is better than mere love. Away from her just now, who can tell what mad adventure——! You see, he has had the curb so long!"

But in a day or two there came a letter—unusually

long for Gaston—to Mrs. Gasgoyne herself. It was simple, descriptive, with a dash of epigram. It acknowledged that he had felt the curb, and wanted a touch of the unconventional. It spoke of Ian Belward in a dry phrase, and it asked for the date of the yacht's arrival at Gibraltar.

"Warren, the man is still sensible," she said. "This letter is honest. He is much a heathen at heart, but I believe he hasn't given Delia cause to blush —and that's a good deal! Dear me, I am fond of the fellow—he is so clever. But clever men are trying."

As for Delia, like every sensible English girl, she enjoyed herself in the time of youth, drinking in delightedly the interest attaching to Gaston's betrothed. His letters had been regular, kind yet not emotionally affectionate, interesting, uncommon. He had a knack of saying as much in one page as most people did in five. Her imagination was not great, but he stimulated it. If he wrote a pungent line on Daudet or Whistler, on Montaigne or Fielding, she was stimulated to know them. One day he sent her Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, which he had picked up in New York on his way to England. This startled her. She had never heard of Whitman. To her he seemed coarse, incomprehensible, ungentlemanly. She could not understand how Gaston could say beautiful things about Montaigne and about Whitman too. She had no conception how he had in him the strain of that

first Sir Gaston Belward, and was also the son of a half-heathen.

He interested her all the more. Her letters were hardly so fascinating to him. She was beautifully correct, but she could not make a sentence breathe. He was grateful, but nothing stirred in him. He could live without her—that he knew regretfully. But he did his part with sincere intention.

That was up to the day when he saw Andrée as Mademoiselle Victorine. Then came a swift change. Day after day he visited her, always in the presence of Annette. Soon they dined often together, still in Annette's presence. At last one day they dined alone.

The Comte Ploaré came no more; he had received his dismissal. Occasionally Gaston visited the menagerie, but generally after the performance, when Victorine had a half-hour's or an hour's romp with her animals. This was a pleasant time to Gaston. The wild life in him responded.

These were hours when the girl was quite naïve and natural, when she spent herself in ripe enjoyment—almost child-like, healthy. At other times there was an indefinable something which Gaston had not noticed in England. But then he had only seen her once. She, too, saw something in him unnoticed before. It was on his tongue a hundred times to tell her that that something was Delia Gasgoyne. He did

not. Perhaps because it seemed so grotesque, perhaps because it was easier to drift. Besides, as he said to himself, he would soon go to join the yacht at Gibraltar, and all this would be over—over. All this? All what? A gipsy, a dompteuse—what was she to him? She interested him, he liked her, and she liked him, but there had been nothing more between them. Near as he was to her now, he very often saw her in his mind's eye as she passed over Ridley Common, looking towards him, her eyes shaded by her hand.

She, too, had continually said to herself that this man could be nothing to her—nothing, never! Yet, why not? Comte Ploaré had offered her his hand. But she knew what had been in Comte Ploaré's mind. Gaston Belward was different—he had befriended her father. She had not singular scruples regarding men, for she despised most of them. She was not a Mademoiselle Cérise, nor a Madame Juliette, though they were higher on the plane of Art than she; or so the world put it. She had not known a man who had not, one time or another, shown himself common or insulting. But since the first moment she had seen Gaston, he had treated her as a lady.

A lady? She had seen enough to smile at that. She knew that she hadn't it in her veins, that she was very much an actress, except in this man's company, when she was mostly natural—as natural as one can be who has a painful secret. They had talked

together—for how many hours? She knew exactly. And he had never descended to that which—she felt instinctively—he would not have shown to the ladies of his English world. She knew what ladies were. In her first few weeks in Paris, her fame mounting, she had lunched with some distinguished people, who entertained her as they would have done one of her lions, if that were possible. She understood. She had a proud, passionate nature; she rebelled at this. Invitations were declined at first on pink note-paper with gaudy flowers in a corner, afterwards on cream-laid vellum, when she saw what the great folk did.

And so the days went on, he telling her of his life from his boyhood up—all but the one thing! But that one thing she came to know, partly by instinct, partly by something he accidentally dropped, partly from something Jacques once said to him. Well, what did it matter to her? He would go back; she would remain. It didn't matter.—Yet, why should she lie to herself? It did matter. And why should she care about that girl in England? She was not supposed to know. The other had everything in her favour; what had Andrée the gipsy girl, or Mademoiselle Victorine, the dompteuse?

One Sunday evening, after dining together, she asked him to take her to see Saracen. It was a long-standing promise. She had never seen him riding; for their hours did not coincide until the late after-

noon or evening. Taking Annette, they went to his new apartments. He had furnished a large studio as a sitting-room, not luxuriantly but pleasantly. It opened into a pretty little garden, with a few plants and trees. They sat there while Jacques went for the horse. Next door a number of students were singing a song of the boulevards. It was followed by one in a woman's voice, sweet and clear and passionate, pitifully reckless. It was, as if in pure contradiction, the opposite of the other,—simple, pathetic. At first there were laughing interruptions from the students; but the girl kept on, and soon silence prevailed, save for the voice:

"And when the wine is dry upon the lip,
And when the flower is broken by the hand,
And when I see the white sails of thy ship
Fly on, and leave me there upon the sand:—
Think you that I shall weep? Nay, I shall smile:
The wine is drunk, the flower it is gone,—
One weeps not when the days no more beguile,—
How shall the tear-drops gather in a stone?"

When it was ended, Andrée, who had listened intently, drew herself up with a little shudder. She sat long, looking into the garden, the cub playing at her feet. Gaston did not disturb her. He got refreshments and put them on the table, rolled a cigarette, and regarded the scene. Her knee was drawn up slightly in her hands, her hat was off, her rich brown hair fell loosely about her head, framing it, her dark

eyes glowed under her bent brows. The lion's cub crawled up on the divan, and thrust its nose under an arm. Its head clung to her waist. Who was it? thought Gaston. Delilah, Cleopatra—who? She was lost in thought. She remained so until the garden door opened, and Jacques entered with Saracen.

She looked. Suddenly she came to her feet with a cry of delight, and ran out towards the horse. There was something essentially childlike in her, something also painfully wild—an animal, and a philosopher, and twenty-three!

Jacques put out his hand as he had done with Mademoiselle Cérise.

"No, no; he is savage!"

"Nonsense!" she rejoined, and came closer.

Gaston watched, interested. He guessed what she would do.

"A horse!" she added.—"You have seen my lions! Leave him free: stand away from him."

Her words were peremptory, and Jacques obeyed. The horse stood alone, a hoof pawing the ground. Presently it sprang away, then half-turned towards the girl, and stood still. She kept talking to him and calling softly, making a coaxing, animal-like sound, as she always did with lions.

She stepped forward a little and paused. The horse suddenly turned straight towards her, came over slowly, and, with arched neck, dropped his head on

her shoulder. She felt the folds of his neck and kissed him. He followed her about the garden like a dog. She brought him to Gaston, looked up, and said with a teasing look:

"I have conquered him: he is mine!"

Gaston looked her in her eyes.

"He is yours."

"And you?"

"He is mine." His looked burned into her soul—how deep, how joyful!

She turned away, her face going suddenly pale. She kept the horse for some time, but at last gave him up again to Jacques. Gaston stepped from the doorway into the garden and met her. It was now dusk. Annette was inside. They walked together in silence for a time. Presently she drew close to him. He felt his veins bounding. Her hand slid into his arm, and, dark as it was, he could see her eyes lifting to his, shining, profound. They had reached the end of the garden, and now turned to come back again.

Suddenly he said, his eyes holding hers:

"The horse is yours—and mine!"

She stood still; but he could see her bosom heaving hard. She threw up her head with a sound half sob, half laugh. . . .

"You are mad!" she said a moment afterwards, as she lifted her head from his breast.

He laughed softly, catching her cheek to his.

"Why be sane? It was to be."

"The gipsy and the gentleman?"

"Gipsies all!"

"And the end of it?"

"Do you not love me, Andrée?"

She caught her hands over her eyes.

"I do not know what it is—only that it is madness! I see, oh! I see a hundred things!"

Her hot eyes were on space.

"What do you see?" he urged.

She gave a sudden cry:

"I see you at my feet—dead!"

"Better than you at mine, dearest."

"Let us go," she said hurriedly.

"Wait," he whispered.

They talked for a little time. Then they entered the studio. Annette was asleep in her chair. Andrée waked her, and they bade Gaston good-night.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEREIN LOVE KNOWS NO LAW SAVE THE MAN'S WILL.

In another week it was announced that Mademoiselle Victorine would take a month's holiday; to the sorrow of her chief, and to the delight of Mr. Meyerbeer, who had not yet discovered Zoug-Zoug, though he had a pretty scandal well-nigh brewed.

Count Ploaré was no more, Gaston Belward was. Zoug-Zoug was in the country at Fontainebleau, working at his picture. He had left on the morning after Gaston discovered Andrée. He had written, asking his nephew to come for some final sittings. Possibly, he said, Mademoiselle Cérise and others would be down for a Sunday. Gaston had not gone, had briefly declined. His uncle shrugged his shoulders, and went on with other work. It would end in his having to go to Paris and finish the picture there, he said. Perhaps the youth was getting into mischief? So much the better. He took no newspapers.—What did an artist need of them? He did not even read the notices sent by a press-cutting agency. He had a model with

him. She amused him for the time, but it was unsatisfactory working on "The King of Ys" from photographs. He loathed it, and gave it up.

One evening Gaston and Andrée met at the Gare Montparnasse. Jacques was gone on, but Annette was there. Meyerbeer was there also, at a safe distance. He saw Gaston purchase tickets, arrange his baggage, and enter the train. He passed the compartment, looking in. Besides the three, there was a priest and a young soldier.

Gaston saw him, and guessed what brought him there. He had an impulse to get out and shake him as would Andrée's cub a puppy. But the train moved off. Meyerbeer found Gaston's porter. A franc did the business.

"Douarnenez, for Audierne, Brittany," was the legend written in Meyerbeer's note-book. And after that: "Journey twenty hours—change at Rennes, Redon, and Quimpére."

"Too far. I've enough for now," said Meyerbeer, chuckling, as he walked away. "But I'd give five hundred to know who Zoug-Zoug is. I'll make another try."

So he held his scandal back for a while yet. Of the colony at the Hôtel St. Malo, not one of the three who knew would tell him. Bagshot had sworn the others to secrecy.

Jacques had gone on with the horses. He was to

rent a house, or get rooms at a hotel. He did very well. The horses were stalled at the Hôtel de France. He had rented an old château perched upon a hill, with steps approaching, steps flanking; near it strange narrow alleys, leading where one cared not to search; a garden of pears and figs, and grapes, and innumerable flowers and an arbour; a pavilion, all windows, over an entrance-way, with a shrine in it—a be-starred shrine below it; bare floors, simple furniture, primitiveness at every turn.

Gaston and Andrée came, of choice, with a courier in a racketing old diligence from Douarnenez, and they laughed with delight, tired as they were, at the new quarters. It must be a gipsy kind of existence at the most.

There were rooms for Jacques and Annette, who at once set to work with the help of a little Breton maid. Jacques had not ordered a dinner at the hotel, but had got in fresh fish, lobsters, chickens, eggs, and other necessaries; and all was ready for a meal which could be got in an hour.

Jacques had now his hour of happiness. He knew not of these morals—they were beyond him; but after a cheerful dinner in the pavilion, with an omelette made by Andrée herself, Annette went to her room and cried herself to sleep. She was civilised, poor soul! and here they were a stone's throw from the curé and the church! Gaston and Andrée, re-

freshed, travelled down the long steps to the village, over the *place*, along the quay, to the lighthouse and the beach, through crowds of sardine-fishers and simple hard-tongued Bretons. Cheerful, buoyant at dinner, there now came upon the girl an intense quiet and fatigue. She stood and looked long at the sea. Gaston tried to rouse her.

"This is your native Brittany, Andrée?" he said.

She pointed far over the sea:

"Near that light at Penmark I was born."

"Can you speak the Breton language?"

"Far worse than you speak Parisian French."

He laughed. "You are so little like these people!"

She had vanity. That had been part of her life. Her beauty had brought trade when she was a gipsy; she had been the admired of Paris: she was only twenty-three. Presently she became restless, and shrank from him. Her eyes had a flitting hunted look. Once they met his with a wild sort of pleading or revolt, he could not tell which, and then were continually turned away. If either could have known how hard the little dwarf of sense and memory was trying to tell her something!

This new phase stunned him. What did it mean? He touched her hand. It was hot, and withdrew from his. He put his arm around her, and she shivered, cringed. But then she was a woman, he thought. He had met one unlike any he had ever

known. He would wait. He would be patient. Would she come—home? She turned passively and took his arm. He talked, but he knew he was talking poorly, and at last he became silent also. But when they came to the steep steps leading to the château, he lifted her in his arms, carried her to the house, and left her at their chamber-door.

Then he went to the pavilion to smoke. He had no wish to think—at least of anything but the girl. It was not a time for retrospect, but to accept a situation. The die had been cast. He had followed what?—his nature, his instincts. The consequence?

He heard Andrée's voice. He went to her.

The next morning they were in the garden walking about. They had been speaking, but now both were silent. At last he turned again to her.

"Andrée, who was the other man?" he asked quietly, but with a strange troubled look in his eyes.

She shrank away astonished, confused, a kind of sickness in her eyes.

"What does it matter?" she said.

"Of course, of course," he returned in a low, nerveless tone.

They were silent for a long time. Meanwhile, she seemed to beat up a feverish cheerfulness. At last she said:

"Where do we go this afternoon, Gaston?"

"We will see," he replied.

The day passed, another, and another. The same: she shrank from him, was impatient, agitated, unhappy, went out alone. Annette saw, and mourned, entreated, prayed; Jacques was miserable. There was no joyous passion to redeem the situation for which Gaston had risked so much.

They rode, they took excursions in fishing-boats and little sail-boats. Andrée entered into these with zest: talked to the sailors, to Jacques, caressed children, and was not indifferent to the notice she attracted in the village; but was obviously distrait. Gaston was patient—and unhappy. So, this was the merchandise for which he had bartered all! But he had a will, he was determined; he had sowed, he would reap his harvest to the useless stubble.

"Do you wish to go back to your work?" he said quietly, once.

"I have no work," she answered apathetically.

He said no more just then.

The days and weeks went by. The situation was impossible: not to be understood. Gaston made his final move. He hoped that perhaps a forced crisis might bring about a change. If it failed—he knew not what!

She was sitting in the garden below,—he alone in the window, smoking. A bundle of letters and papers, brought by the postman that evening, were beside him. He would not open them yet. He felt that

there was trouble in them—he saw phrases, sentences flitting past him. But he would play this other bitter game out first. He let them lie. He heard the bells in the church ringing the village commerce done—it was nine o'clock. The picture of that other garden in Paris came to him: that night when he had first taken this girl into his arms. She sat below talking to Annette and singing a little Breton chanson:

"Parvondt varbondt anan oun,
Et dic don la lire!
Parvondt varbondt anan oun,
Et dic don la, la!"

He called down to her presently.

"Andrée!"

"Yes."

"Will you come up for a moment, please?"

"Surely."

She came up, leaving the room-door open, and bringing the cub with her. He called Jacques.

"Take the cub to its quarters, Jacques," he said, quietly.

She seemed about to protest, but sat back and watched him. He shut the door—locked it. Then he came and sat down before her.

"Andrée," he said, "this is all impossible."

"What is impossible?"

"You know well. I am not a mere brute. The only thing that can redeem this life is affection."

"That is true," she said, coldly. "What then?"

"You do not redeem it. We must part."

She laughed fitfully. "We must——?"

She leaned towards him.

"To-morrow evening you will go back to Paris. To-night we part, however: that is, our relations cease."

"I shall go from here when it pleases me, Gaston!"

His voice came low and stern, but courteous:

"You must go when I tell you. Do you think I am the weaker?"

He could see her colour flying, her fingers lacing and interlacing.

"Aren't you afraid to tell me that?" she said.

"Afraid? Of my life—you mean that? That you will be as common as that? No: you will do as I tell you."

He fixed his eyes on hers, and held them. She sat, looking. Presently she tried to take her eyes away. She could not. She shuddered and shrank.

He withdrew his eyes for a moment.

"You will go?" he asked.

"It makes no difference," she answered; then added sharply: "Who are you, to look at me like that, to——!"

She paused.

"I am your master!"

He rose. "Good-night," he said, at the door, and went out.

He heard the key turn in the lock. He had forgotten his papers and letters. It did not matter. He would read them when she was gone—if she did go. He was far from sure that he had succeeded. He went to bed in another room, and was soon asleep.

He was waked in the very early morning by feeling a face against his, wet, trembling.

"What is it, Andrée?" he asked.

Her arms ran round his neck.

"*Oh, mon amour! Mon adoré! Je t'aime! Je t'aime!*"

In the evening of this day she said she knew not how it was, but on that first evening in Audierne there suddenly came to her a strange terrible feeling, which seemed to dry up all the springs of her desire for him. She could not help it. She had fought against it, but it was no use; yet she knew that she could not leave him. After he had told her to go, she had had a bitter struggle: now tears, now anger, and a wish to hate. At last she fell asleep. When she awoke she had changed, she was her old self, as in Paris, when she had first confessed her love. She felt that she must die if she did not go to him. All the first passion returned, the passion that began on the common at Ridley Court.

"And now—now," she said, "I know that I cannot live without you."

It seemed so. Her nature was emptying itself. Gaston had got the merchandise for which he had given a price yet to be known.

"You asked me of the other man," she said. "I cannot tell you. Make me. You can."

"Not now," he said. "You loved him?"

"No—dear God, no!" she answered.

An hour after, when she was in her room, he opened the little bundle of correspondence.—A memorandum with money from his bankers. A letter from Delia, and also one from Mrs. Gasgoyne, saying that they expected to meet him at Gibraltar on a certain day, and asking why he had not written; Delia with sorrowful reserve, Mrs. Gasgoyne with impatience. His letters had missed them—he had written on leaving Paris, saying that his plans were indefinite, but he would write them definitely soon. After he came to Audierne it seemed impossible to write. How could he? No, let the American journalist do it. Better so. Better himself in the worst light, with the full penalty, than his own confession—in itself an insult. So, it had gone on.

He slowly tore up the letters. The next were from his grandfather and grandmother—they did not know yet. He could not read them. A few loving sentences, and then he said:

"What's the good! Better not!"

He tore them up also.

Another—from his uncle. It was brief:

"You've made a sweet mess of it, Cadet. It's in all the papers to-day. Meyerbeer telegraphed it to New York and London. I'll probably come down to see you. I want to finish my picture on the site of the old City of Ys, there at Point du Raz. Your girl can pose with you. I'll do all I can to clear the thing up. But a British M. P.—that's a tough pill for Clapham!"

Gaston's foot tapped the floor angrily. He scattered the pieces of the letter at his feet. Now for the newspapers. He opened *Le Petit Journal*, *Gil Blas*, *Galignani*, and the *New York Tom-Tom*, one by one. Yes, it was there, with pictures of himself and Andrée. A screaming sensation. Extracts, too, from the English papers by telegram. He read them all unflinchingly. There was one paragraph which he did not understand:

"There was a previous lover, unknown to the public, called Zoug-Zoug."

He remembered that day at the Hôtel St. Malo!

Well, the bolt was shot: the worst was over. *Quid refert?* Justify himself?

Certainly, to all but Delia Gasgoyne.

Thousands of men did the same—did it in cold blood, without one honest feeling. He did it, at least under a powerful influence. He could not help but smile now at the thought of how he had filled both sides

of the equation. On his father's side, bringing down the mad record from Naseby; on his mother's, true to the heathen, by following his impulses—sacred to primitive man, justified by spear, arrow, and a strong arm. Why sheet home this as a scandal? How did they—the libellers—know but what he had married the girl?

Exactly. He would see to that. He would play his game with open sincerity now. He could have wished secrecy for Delia Gasgoyne, and for his grandfather and grandmother,—he was not wilfully brutal,—but otherwise he had no shame at all; he would stand openly for his right. Better one honest passion than a life of deception and miserable compromise. A British M. P.?—He had thrown away his reputation, said the papers. By this?—The girl was no man's wife, he no woman's husband!

Marry her? Yes, he would marry her; she should be his wife. His people? It was a pity. Poor old people—they would fret and worry. He had been selfish, had not thought of them? Well, who could foresee this outrage of journalism? The luck had been dead against him. Did he not know plenty of men in London—he was going to say the Commons, but he was fairer to the Commons than it, as a body, would be to him—who did much worse? These had escaped: the hunters had been after him. What would he do? Take the whip? He got to his feet with an oath. Take the whip! Never—never! He

would fight this thing tooth and nail. Had he come to England to let them use him for a sensation only—a sequence of surprises, to end in a tragedy, all for the furtive pleasure of the British breakfast-table? No, by the Eternal! What had the first Gaston done? He had fought—fought Villiers and others, and had held up his head beside his King and Rupert till the hour of Naseby.

When the summer was over he would return to Paris, to London. The journalist—punish him? No; too little—a product of his time. But the British people he would fight, and he would not give up Ridley Court. He could throw the game over when it was all his, but never when it was going dead against him.

That speech in the Commons? He remembered gladly that he had contended for conceptions of social miseries according to surrounding influences of growth and situation. He had not played the hypocrite.

No, not even with Delia. He had acted honestly at the beginning, and afterwards he had done what he could so long as he could. It was inevitable that she must be hurt, even if he had married, not giving her what he had given this dompteuse. After all, was it so terrible? It could not affect her much in the eyes of the world. And her heart? He did not flatter himself. Yet he knew that it would be the thing—the fallen idol—that would grieve her more than

thought of the man. He wished that he could have spared her, in the circumstances. But it had all come too suddenly: it was impossible. He had spared, he could spare, nobody. There was the whole situation.

What now to do?—To remain here while it pleased them, then Paris, then London for his fight.

Three days went round. There were idle hours by the sea, little excursions in a sail-boat to Penmark, and at last to Point du Raz. It was a beautiful day, with a gentle breeze, and the point was glorified. The boat ran in lightly between the steep dark shore and the comb of reef that looked like a host of stealthy pumas crumbling the water. They anchored in the Bay des Trépassés. An hour on shore exploring the caves, and lunching, and then they went back to the boat, accompanied by a Breton sailor, who had acted as guide.

Gaston lay reading,—they were in the shade of the cliff,—while Andrée listened to the Breton tell the legends of the coast. At length Gaston's attention was attracted. The old sailor was pointing to the shore, and speaking in bad French.

"*Voilà*, madame, where the City of Ys stood long before the Bretons came. It was a foolish ride."

"I do not know the story. Tell me."

"There are two or three, but mine is the oldest. A flood came—sent by the gods, for the woman was

impious. The king must ride with her into the sea and leave her there, himself to come back, and so save the city."

The sailor paused to scan the sea—something had struck him. He shook his head. Gaston was watching Andrée from behind his book.

"Well, well," she said, impatiently, "what then? What did he do?"

"The king took up the woman, and rode into the sea as far as where you see the great white stone—it has been there ever since. There he had a fight—not with the woman, but in his heart. He turned to the people, and cried: 'Dry be your streets, and as ashes your eyes for your king!' And then he rode on with the woman till they saw him no more—never!"

Andrée said instantly:

"That was long ago. Now the king would ride back alone."

She did not look at Gaston, but she knew that his eyes were on her. He closed the book, got up, came forward to the sailor, who was again looking out to sea, and said carelessly over his shoulder:

"Men who lived centuries ago would act the same now, if they were here."

Her response seemed quite as careless as his:

"How do you know?"

"Perhaps I had an innings then!" he answered, smiling whimsically.

She was about to speak again, but the guide suddenly said:

"You must get away. There'll be a change of wind and a bad cross-current soon."

In a few minutes the two were bearing out—none too soon, for those pumas crowded up once or twice within a fathom of their deck, devilish and devouring. But they wore away with a capricious current, and down a tossing sea made for Audierne.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAN AND THE WOMAN FACE THE INTOLERABLE.

In a couple of hours they rounded Point de Leroily, and ran for the harbour. By hugging the quay in the channel to the left of the bar, they were sure of getting in, though the tide was low. The boat was docile to the lug-sail and the helm. As they were beating in they saw a large yacht running straight across a corner of the bar for the channel. It was Warren Gasgoyne's *Kismet*.

The *Kismet* had put into Audierne rather than try to pass Point du Raz at night. At Gibraltar a telegram had come telling of the open scandal, and the yacht was instantly headed for England; Mrs. Gasgoyne crossing the Continent, Delia preferring to go back with her father—his sympathy was more tender. They had seen no newspapers, and they did not know that Gaston was at Audierne. Gasgoyne knowing, as all the world knew, that there was a bar at the mouth of the harbour, allowed himself, as he thought, sufficient room, but the wind had suddenly drawn ahead, and he was obliged to keep away.

Presently the yacht took the ground with great force.

Gasgoyne put the helm hard down, but she would not obey. He tried at once to get in his sails, but the surf was running very strong, and presently a heavy sea broke clean over her. Then came confusion and dismay: the flapping of the wet, half-lowered sails, and the whipping of the slack ropes, making all effort useless. There was no chance of her holding. Foot by foot she was being driven towards the rocks. Sailors stood motionless on the shore. The lifeboat would be of little use: besides, it could not arrive for some time.

Gaston had recognised the *Kismet*. He turned to Andrée.

"There's danger, but perhaps we can do it. Will you go?"

She flushed.

"Have I ever been a coward, Gaston. Tell me what to do."

"Keep the helm firm, and act instantly on my orders."

Instead of coming round into the channel, he kept straight on past the light-house towards the yacht, until he was something to seaward of her. Then, luffing quickly, he dropped sail, let go the anchor, and unshipped the mast, while Andrée got the oars into the rowlocks. It was his idea to dip under the yacht's

stern, but he found himself drifting alongside, and in danger of dashing broadside on her. He got an oar and backed with all his strength towards the stern, the anchor holding well. Then he called to those on board to be ready to jump. Once in line with the *Kismet's* counter, he eased off the painter rapidly, and now dropped towards the stern of the wreck.

Gaston was quite cool. He did not now think of the dramatic nature of this meeting, apart from the physical danger. Delia also had recognised him, and guessed who the girl was. Not to respond to Gaston's call was her first instinct. But then, life was sweet. Besides, she had to think of others. Her father, too, was chiefly concerned for her safety and for his yacht. He had almost determined to get Delia on Gaston's boat, and himself take the chances with the *Kismet;* but his sailors dissuaded him, declaring that the chances were against succour.

The only greetings were words of warning and direction from Gaston. Presently there was an opportunity. Gaston called sharply to Delia, and she, standing ready, jumped. He caught her in his arms as she came. The boat swayed as the others leaped, and he held her close meanwhile. Her eyes closed, she shuddered and went white. When he put her down, she covered her face with her hands, trembling. Then, suddenly she came huddling in a heap, and burst into tears.

They slipped the painter, a sailor took Andrée's place at the helm, the oars were got out, and they made over to the channel, grazing the bar once or twice, by reason of the now heavy load.

Warren Gasgoyne and Gaston had not yet spoken in the way of greeting. The former went to Delia now and said a few cheery words, but, from behind her handkerchief, she begged him to leave her alone for a moment.

"Nerves, all nerves, Mr. Belward!" he said, turning towards Gaston. "But, then, it was ticklish—ticklish!"

They did not shake hands. Gaston was looking at Delia, and he did not reply.

Mr. Gasgoyne continued:

"Nasty sea coming on—afraid to try Point du Raz. Of course we didn't know you were here."

He looked at Andrée curiously. He was struck by the girl's beauty and force. But how different from Delia!

He suddenly turned, and said bluntly, in a low voice:

"Belward, what a fool—what a fool! You had it all at your feet: the best—the very best!"

Gaston answered quietly:

"It's an awkward time for talking.—The rocks will have your yacht in half an hour."

Gasgoyne turned towards it.

"Yes, she'll get a raking fore and aft." Then, he added, suddenly: "Of course you know how we feel about our rescue. It was plucky of you!"

"Pluckier in the girl," was the reply.

"Brave enough!" the honest rejoinder.

Gaston had an impulse to say, "Shall I thank her for you?" but he was conscious how little right he had to be ironical with Warren Gasgoyne, and he held his peace.

While the two were now turned away towards the *Kismet*, Andrée came to Delia. She did not quite know how to comfort her, but she was a woman, and perhaps a supporting arm would do something.

"There, there, dear," she said, passing a hand round her shoulder, "you are all right now. Don't cry!"

With a gasp of horror, Delia got to her feet, but swayed, and fell fainting—into Andrée's arms.

She awoke near the landing-place, her father beside her. Meanwhile Andrée had read the riddle. As Mr. Gasgoyne bathed Delia's face, and Gaston her wrists, and gave her brandy, she sat still and intent, watching. Tears and fainting! Would she—Andrée—have given way like that in the same circumstances? No. But this girl—Delia—was of a different order: was that it? All nerves and sentiment! At one of those lunches in the grand world she had seen a lady burst into tears suddenly at someone's reference to

Senegal. She herself had only cried four times, that she remembered;—when her mother died; when her father was called a thief; when, one day, she suffered the first great shame of her life in the mountains of Auvergne; and the night when she waked a second time to her love for Gaston.—She dared to call it love, though good Annette had called it a mortal sin.

What was to be done? The other woman must suffer. The man was hers—hers for ever! He had said it: for ever. Yet her heart had a wild hunger for that something which this girl had and she had not. But the man was hers! She had won him away from this other.

Delia came upon the quay bravely, passing through the crowd of staring fishermen, who presently gave Gaston a guttural cheer. Three of them, indeed, had been drinking his health. They embraced him and kissed him, begging him to come with them for absinthe. He arranged the matter with a couple of francs.

Then he wondered what now was to be done. He could not insult the Gasgoynes by asking them to come to the château. He proposed the Hôtel de France to Mr. Gasgoyne, who assented. It was difficult to separate here on the quay: they must all walk together to the hotel. Gaston turned to speak to Andrée, but she was gone. She had saved the situation.

The three spoke little, and then but formally, as they walked to the hotel. Mr. Gasgoyne said that they would leave by train for Paris the next day, going to Douarnenez that evening. They had saved nothing from the yacht.

Delia did not speak. She was pale, composed now. In the hotel Mr. Gasgoyne arranged for rooms, while Gaston got some sailors together, and, in Mr. Gasgoyne's name, offered a price for the recovery of the yacht or of certain things in her. Then he went into the hotel to see if he could do anything further. The door of the sitting-room was open, and no answer coming to his knock, he entered.

Delia was standing in the window. Against her will her father had gone to find a doctor. Gaston would have drawn back if she had not turned round wearily to him.

Perhaps it were well to get it over now! He came forward. She made no motion.

"I hope you feel better?" he said. "It was a bad accident."

"I am tired and shaken, of course," she responded. "It was very brave of you."

He hesitated, then said:

"We were more fortunate than brave."

He was determined to have Andrée included. She deserved that; the wrong to Delia was not hers.

But she answered after the manner of a woman:

"The girl—ah, yes, please thank her for us. What is her name?"

"She is known in Audierne—as Madame Belward."

The girl started. Her face had a cold, scornful pride.

"The Bretons, then, have a taste for fiction?"

"No, they speak as they are taught."

"They understand, then, as little as I."

How proud, how ineffaceably superior she was!

"Be ignorant for ever," he answered quietly.

"I do not need the counsel, believe me."

Her hand trembled, though it rested against the window—trembled with indignation: the insult of his elopement kept beating up her throat in spite of her.

At that moment a servant knocked, entered, and said that a parcel had been brought for mademoiselle. It was laid upon the table. Delia, wondering, ordered it to be opened. A bundle of clothes was disclosed—Andrée's! Gaston recognised them, and caught his breath with wonder and confusion.

"Who has sent them?" Delia said to the servant.

"They come from the Château Ronan, mademoiselle."

Delia dismissed the servant.

"The Château Ronan?" she asked of Gaston.

"Where I am living."

"It is not necessary to speak of this?" She flushed.

"Not at all. I will have them sent back. There is a little shop near by where you can get what you may need."

Andrée had acted according to her lights. It was not an olive-branch, but a touch of primitive hospitality. She was Delia's enemy at sight, but a woman must have linen.

Mr. Gasgoyne entered. Gaston prepared to go.

"Is there anything more that I can do?" he said, as it were, to both.

The girl replied. "Nothing at all, thank you."

They did not shake hands.

Mr. Gasgoyne could not think that all had necessarily ended. The thing might be patched up one day yet. This affair with the dompteuse was mad sailing, but the man might round-to suddenly and be no worse for the escapade.

"We are going early in the morning," he said. "We can get along all right. Good-bye! When do you come to England?"

The reply was prompt. "In a few weeks."

He looked at both. The girl, seeing that he was going to speak further, bowed and left the room.

His eyes followed her. After a moment, he said firmly:

"Mr. Gasgoyne, I am going to face all."

"To live it down, Belward?"

"I am going to fight it down!"

"Well, there's a difference. You have made a mess of things, and shocked us all. I needn't say what more. It's done, and now you know what such things mean to a good woman—and, I hope also, to the father of a good woman."

The man's voice broke a little. He added:

"They used to come to swords or pistols on such points. We can't settle it in that way. Anyhow, you have handicapped us to-day." Then, with a burst of reproach, indignation, and trouble: "Great God! as if you hadn't been the luckiest man on earth! Delia, the estate, the Commons—all for a dompteuse!"

"Let us say nothing more," said Gaston, choking down wrath at the reference to Andrée, but sorrowful, and pitying Mr. Gasgoyne. Besides, the man had a right to rail.

Soon after they parted courteously.

Gaston went to the château. As he came up the stone steps he met a procession—it was the feast-day of the Virgin—of priests and people and little children, filing up from the village and the sea, singing as they came. He drew up to the wall, stood upon the stone seat, and took off his hat while the procession passed. He had met the curé, first accidentally on the shore, and afterwards in the curé's house, finding

much in common—he had known many priests in the North, known much good of them. The curé glanced up at him now as they passed, and a half-sad smile crossed his face. Gaston caught it as it passed. The curé read his case truly enough and gently enough too. In some wise hour he would plead with Gaston for the woman's soul and his own.

Gaston did not find Andrée at the château. She had gone out alone towards the sea, Annette said, by a route at the rear of the village. He went also, but did not find her. As he came again to the quay he saw the *Kismet* beating upon the rocks—the sailors had given up any idea of saving her. He stood and watched the sea breaking over her, and the whole scene flashed back on him. He thought how easily he could be sentimental over the thing. But that was not his nature. He had made his bed, but he would not lie in it—he would carry it on his back. They all said that *he* had gone on the rocks. He laughed.

"I can turn that tide: I can make things come my way," he said. "All they want is sensation, it isn't morals that concerns them. Well, I'll give them sensation! They expect me to hide, and drop out of the game. Never—so help me, God! I'll play it so they'll forget this—they'll have to!"

He rolled and lighted a cigarette, and went again to the château. Dinner was ready—had been ready

for some time. He sat down, and presently Andrée came. There was a look in her face that he could not understand. They ate their dinner quietly, not mentioning the events of the afternoon.

Presently a telegram was brought to him. It read: "Come. My office, Downing Street, Friday. Expect you." It was signed "Faramond." At the same time came letters: from his grandfather, from Captain Maudsley. The first was stern, imperious, reproachful.—Shame for those that took him in and made him, a ruined reputation, a spoiled tradition: he had been but a heathen after all! There was only left to bid him farewell, and to enclose a cheque for two thousand pounds.

Captain Maudsley called him a fool, and asked him what he meant to do—hoped he would give up the woman at once, and come back. He owed something to his position as Master of the Hounds—a tradition that oughtn't to be messed about.

There it all was: not a word about radical morality or immorality; but the tradition of Family, the Commons, Master of the Hounds!

But there was another letter. He did not recognise the handwriting, and the envelope had a black edge. He turned it over and over, forgetting that Andrée was watching him. Looking up, he caught her eyes, with their strange, sad look. She guessed what was in these letters. She knew English well

enough to understand them. He interpreted her look, and pushed them over.

"You may read them, if you wish; but I wouldn't, if I were you."

She read the telegram first, and asked who "Faramond" was. Then she read Sir William Belward's letter, and afterwards Captain Maudsley's.

"It has all come at once," she said: "the girl and these! What will you do? Give 'the woman' up for the honour—of the Master of the Hounds?"

The tone was bitter, exasperating.

Gaston was patient.

"What do you think, Andrée?"

"Oh! it has only begun," she said. "Wait, King of Ys. Read that other letter."

Her eyes were fascinated by the black border. He opened it with a strange slowness. It began without any form of address, it had the superscription of a street in Manchester Square:

"If you were not in deep trouble I would not write. But because I know that more hard things than kind will be said by others, I want to say what is in my heart, which is quick to feel for you. I know that you have sinned, but I pray for you every day, and I cannot believe that God will not answer. Oh! think of the wrong that you have done: of the wrong to the girl, to her soul's good. Think of that, and right the wrong in so far as you can. Oh, Gaston, my brother!—I need not explain why I write thus. My grandfather, before he died, three weeks ago, told me that you know!—and I also have known ever since the day you saved the boy. Oh! think of one who would give years of her life to see you good and noble and happy. . . ."

Then followed a deep, sincere appeal to his manhood, and afterwards a wish that their real relations should be made known to the world if he needed her, or if disaster came; that she might share and comfort his life, whatever it might be. Then again:

"If you love her, and she loves you, and is sorry for what she has done, marry her and save her from everlasting shame. I am staying with my grandfather's cousin, the Dean of Dighbury, the father of the boy you saved. He is very kind, and he knows all. May God guide you aright, and may you believe that no one speaks more truthfully to you than your sorrowful and affectionate sister, ALICE WINGFIELD."

He put the letter down beside him, made a cigarette, and poured out some coffee for them both. He was holding himself with a tight hand. This letter had touched him as nothing in his life had done since his father's death. It had nothing of *noblesse oblige*, but straight statement of wrong, as she saw it. And a sister—an illegitimate sister: the mere fidelity of blood! His father had brought this sorrowful life into the world and he had made it more sorrowful—poor little thing—poor girl!

"What are you going to do?" said Andrée. "Do you go back—with Delia?"

He winced. Yet why should he expect of her too great refinement? She had not had a chance, she had not the stuff for it in her veins; she had never been taught. But behind it all was her passion—her love—for him.

"Not with her: you know that's impossible!" he answered.

"She would not take you back."

"Probably not. She has pride."

"Pride—*chut!* She'd jump at the chance!"

"That sounds a little vulgar, Andrée; and it is contradictory."

"Vulgar! Well, I'm a gipsy and a dompteuse!"

"Is that all, my girl?"

"That's all, now." Then, with a sudden change and a quick sob: "But I may be—Oh, I can't say it, Gaston!" She hid her face for a moment on his shoulder.

"My God!"

He got to his feet. He had not thought of that—of another besides themselves. He had drifted. A hundred ideas ran back and forth. He went to the window and stood looking out. Alice's letter was still in his fingers.

She came and touched his shoulder.

"Are you going to leave me, Gaston? What does that letter say?"

He looked at her kindly, with a protective tenderness.

"Read the letter, Andrée," he said.

She did so, at first slowly, then quickly, then over and over again. He stood motionless in the window.

She pushed the letter between his fingers. He did not turn.

"I cannot understand everything, but what she says she means. Oh, Gaston, what a fool, what a fool you've been!"

After a moment, however, she threw her arms about him with animal-like fierceness.

"But I can't give you up—I can't!" Then, with another of those sudden changes, she added, with a wild little laugh: "I can't, I can't, O Master of the Hounds!"

There was a knock at the door. Annette entered with a letter. The postman had not delivered it on his rounds, because the address was not correct. It was for madame. Andrée took it, started at the handwriting, tore open the envelope, and read:

"Zoug-Zoug congratulates you on the conquest of his nephew. Zoug-Zoug's name is not George Maur, as you knew him. Allah's blessing, with Zoug-Zoug's!

"What fame you've got now—dompteuse, and the sweet scandal!"

The journalist had found out Zoug-Zoug at last, and Ian Belward had talked with the manager of the menagerie.

Andrée shuddered and put the letter in her pocket. Now she understood why she had shrunk from Gaston that first night and those first days in Audierne: that strange sixth sense, divination—vague, helpless pre-

science. And here, suddenly, she shrank again, but with a different thought. She hurriedly left the room and went to her chamber.

In a few moments he came to her. She was sitting upright in a chair, looking straight before her. Her lips were bloodless, her eyes were burning. He came and took her hands.

"What is it, Andrée?" he said. "That letter, dear!"

She looked at him steadily.

"You'll be sorry if you read it."

But she gave it to him. He lighted a candle, put it on a little table, sat down, and read. The shock went deep; so deep that it made no violent sign on the surface. He spread the letter out before him. The candle showed his face gone grey and knotted with misery. He could bear all the rest: fight, do all that was right to the coming mother of his child; but this made him sick and dizzy. He felt as he did when he waked up in Labrador, with his wife's dead lips pressed to his neck. It was strange too that Andrée was as quiet as he: no storm—misery had gone deep with her also.

"Do you care to tell me about it?" he said.

She sat back in her chair, her hands over her eyes. Presently, still sitting so, she spoke.

Ian Belward had painted them and their van in the hills of Auvergne, and had persuaded her to sit

for a picture. He had treated her courteously at first. Her father was taken ill suddenly, and died. She was alone for a few days afterwards. Ian Belward came to her. Of that time, from which the artist would carry to his grave a scar on the neck, made by a weapon in her frenzied hands, Gaston heard with a hard sort of coldness. The promised marriage was a matter for the man's mirth a week later. They came across three young artists from Paris—Bagshot, Fancourt, and another—who camped one night beside them. It was then she fully realised the deep shame of her position. The next night she ran away and joined a travelling menagerie. The rest he knew. When she had ended there was silence for a time, broken only by one quick gasping sob from Gaston. The girl sat still as death, her eyes on him intently.

"Poor Andrée! Poor girl!" he said at last.

She sighed—how pitifully!

"What shall we do?" she asked.

He scarcely spoke above a whisper:

"There must be time to think. I will go to London."

"You will come back?"

"Yes—in five days, if I live."

"I believe you," she said quietly. "You never lied to me. When you return we will know what to do." Her manner was strangely quiet. "A little

trading schooner goes from Douarnenez to England to-morrow morning," she went on. "There is a notice of it in the market-place. That would save the journey to Paris."

"Yes, that will do very well. I will start for Douarnenez at once."

"Will Jacques go too?"

"No."

An hour later he passed Delia and her father on the road to Douarnenez. He did not recognise them, but Delia, seeing him, shrank away in a corner of the carriage, trembling.

Jacques had wished to go to London with Gaston, but had been denied. He was to care for the horses. When he saw his master ride down over the *place*, waving a hand back towards him, he came in and said to Andrée:

"Madame, there is trouble—I do not know what. But I once said I would never leave him, wherever he go or whatever he did. Well, I never will leave him —or you, madame—no!"

"That is right, that is right," she said earnestly; "you must never leave him, Jacques. He is a good man!"

When Jacques had gone she shut herself up in her room. She was gathering all her life into the compass of an hour. She felt but one thing: the ruin of her happiness and Gaston's.

"He is a good man," she said over and over to herself. And the other, who ruined her?—All the barbarian in her was alive!

The next morning she started for Paris, saying to Jacques and Annette that she would return in four days.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"RETURN, O SHULAMITE!"

ALMOST the first person that Gaston recognised in London was Cluny Vosse. He had been to Victoria Station to see a friend off by the train, and as he was leaving, Gaston and he recognised each other. The lad's greeting was a little shy until he saw that Gaston was cool and composed as usual—in effect, nothing had happened! Cluny was delighted, and opened his mind:

"They'd kicked up a deuce of a row in the papers, and there'd been no end of talk; but he didn't see what all the babble was about, and he'd said so again and again to Lady Dargan."

"And Lady Dargan, Cluny?" asked Gaston quietly.

Cluny could not be dishonest, though he would try hard not to say painful things.

"Well, she was a bit fierce at first—she's a woman, you know; but afterwards she went like a baby; cried, and wouldn't stay at Cannes any longer: so we're back

in town. We're going down to the country, though, to-morrow or next day."

"Do you think I had better call, Cluny?" Gaston ventured suggestively.

"Yes, yes, of course," Cluny replied, with great eagerness, as if to justify the matter to himself.

Gaston smiled, said that he might—he was only in town for a few days,—and dropped Cluny in Pall Mall.

Cluny came running back.

"I say, Belward, things'll come around just as they were before, won't they? You're going to cut in, and not let 'em walk on you?"

"Yes, I'm 'going to cut in,' Cluny boy."

Cluny brightened.

"And of course it isn't all over with Delia, is it?" He blushed.

Gaston reached out and dropped a hand on Cluny's shoulder.

"I'm afraid it is all over, Cluny."

Cluny spoke without thinking.

"I say, it's rough on her, isn't it?"

Then he was confused, hurriedly offered Gaston a cigarette, a hasty good-bye was said, and they parted.

Gaston went first to Lord Faramond. He encountered inquisition, cynical humour, flashes of sympathy, with a general flavour of reproach. The tradition of the Commons! Ah, one way only: he must come back

alone—alone—and live it down. Fortunately, it wasn't an intrigue—no matter of divorce—a dompteuse, he believed. It must end, of course, and he would see what could be done. Such a chance—such a chance as he had had! Make it up with his grandfather, and reverse the record—reverse the record: that was the only way. This meeting must, of course, be strictly between themselves. But he was really interested for him, for his people, and for the tradition of the Commons.

"I am Master of the Hounds too," said Gaston dryly.

Lord Faramond caught the meaning, and smiled grimly.

Then came Gaston's decision—he would come back—not to live the thing down, but to hold his place as long as he could: to fight.

Lord Faramond shrugged a shoulder.

"Without the woman?"

"I cannot say that."

"With the woman, I can promise nothing—nothing. You cannot fight it with her. No one man is stronger than massed opinion. It is merely a matter of pressure. No, no; I can promise nothing in that case."

The Premier's face had gone cold and disdainful. Why should a clever man like Belward be so infatuated? He rose, Gaston thanked him for the meeting,

and was about to go, when the Prime Minister, tapping his shoulder kindly, said:

"Mr. Belward, you are not playing to the rules of the game." He waved his hand towards the Chamber of the House. "It is the greatest game in the world: the woman must go! Do not reply. You *will* come back without her—good-bye!"

Then came Ridley Court. He entered on Sir William and Lady Belward without announcement. Sir William came to his feet, austere and pale. Lady Belward's fingers trembled on the lace she held. They looked many years older. Neither spoke his name, nor did they offer their hands. Gaston did not wince, he had expected it. He owed these old people something. They lived according to their lights, they had acted righteously as by their code, they had used him well—well always.

"Will you hear the whole story?" he said.

He felt that it would be best to tell them all.

"Can it do any good?" asked Sir William.

He looked towards his wife.

"Perhaps it is better to hear it," she murmured. She was clinging to a vague hope.

Gaston told the story plainly, briefly, as he had told his earlier history. Its concision and simplicity were poignant. From the day he first saw Andrée in the justice's room till the hour when she opened Ian Belward's letter, his tale went. Then he paused.

"I remember very well," Sir William said, with painful meditation: "a strange girl, with a remarkable face. You pleaded for her father then. Ah, yes, an unhappy case!"

"There is more?" asked Lady Belward, leaning on her cane. She seemed very frail.

Then with a terrible brevity Gaston told them of his uncle, of the letter to Andrée: all. He had no idea of sparing Ian Belward now. A groan escaped Lady Belward.

"And now—now, what will you do?" asked the baronet.

"I do not know. I am going back first to the girl."

Sir William's face was ashy.

"Impossible!"

"I promised, and I will go back."

Lady Belward's voice quivered:

"Stay, oh, stay, and redeem the past. You can, oh, you can outlive it."

Always the same: live it down!

"It is no use," he answered; "I must return."

Then in a few words he thanked them for all, and bade them good-bye. He did not offer his hand, nor did they. But at the door he heard Lady Belward say in a pleading voice—

"Gaston!"

He returned. She held out her hand.

"You must not do as your father did," she said. "Give the woman up, and come back to us. Oh! am I nothing to you—nothing?"

"Is there no other way?" he asked, gravely, sorrowfully.

She did not reply. He turned to his grandfather.

"There is no other way," said the old man, sternly. Then in a voice almost shrill with pain and indignation, he cried out as he had never done in his life: "Nothing, nothing, nothing but disgrace! My God in heaven! a lion-tamer—a gipsy! An honourable name dragged through the mire! Go back," he said grandly; "go back to the woman, and she to her lions —savages, savages, savages!"

"Savages after the manner of our forefathers," Gaston answered quietly. "The first Gaston showed us the way.—His was a strolling player's daughter. Good-bye, sir."

Lady Belward's face was in her hands.

"Good-bye—grandmother," he said at the door, and then he was gone.

At the outer door the old housekeeper stepped forward, her gloomy face most agitated.

"Oh, sir! oh, sir! you will come back again? Oh, don't go like your father!"

He suddenly threw an arm about her shoulder, and kissed her on the cheek.

"I'll come back—yes, I'll come back here—if I can. Good-bye, Hovey."

In the library Sir William and Lady Belward sat silent for a time. Presently Sir William rose, and walked up and down. He paused at last, and said, in a strange, hesitating voice, his hands chafing each other:

"I forgot myself, my dear. I fear I was violent. I would like to ask his pardon. Ah, yes, yes."

Then he sat down and took her hand, and held it long in the silence.

"It all feels so empty—so empty!" she said at last, as the tower-clock struck hollow on the air.

The old man could not reply, but he drew her close to him, and Hovey, from the door, saw his tears dropping on her white hair.

Gaston went to Manchester Square. He half dreaded a meeting with Alice, and yet he wished it. He did not find her. She had gone to Paris with her uncle, the servant said. He got their address. There was little left to do but to avoid reporters, two of whom almost forced themselves in upon him. He was to go back to Douarnenez by the little boat that brought him, and at seven o'clock in the morning he watched the mists of England recede.

He chanced to put his hand into a light overcoat which he had got at his chambers before he started. He drew out a paper, the one discovered in the so-

licitor's office in London. It was an ancient deed of entail of the property, drawn by Sir Gaston Belward, which, through being lost, was never put into force. He was not sure that it had value. If it had, all chance of the estate was gone for him; it would be his uncle's. Well, what did it matter? Yes, it did matter: Andrée! For her? No, not for her! He would play straight. He would take his future as it came: he would not drop this paper into the water.

He smiled bitterly, got an envelope at a public-house on the quay, wrote a few words in pencil on the document, and in a few moments it was on its way to Sir William Belward, who when he received it said:

"Worthless, quite worthless! But he has an honest mind—an honest mind!"

Meanwhile, Andrée was in Paris. Leaving her bag at the Gare Montparnasse, she had gone straight to Ian Belward's house. She had lived years in the last few hours. She had had no sleep on the journey, and her mind had been strained unbearably. It had, however, a fixed idea, which shuttled in and out in a hundred shapes, but ever pointing to one end. She had determined on a painful thing—the only way.

She reached the house, and was admitted. In answer to questions, she had an appointment with monsieur. He was not within. Well, she would wait. She was motioned into the studio. She was outward-

ly calm. The servant presently recognised her. He had been to the menagerie, and he had seen her with Gaston. His manner changed instantly. Could he do anything? No, nothing. She was left alone. For a long time she sat motionless, then a sudden restlessness seized her. Her brain seemed a burning atmosphere, in which every thought, every thing showed with an unbearable intensity. The terrible clearness of it all—how it made her eyes, her heart ache! Her blood was beating hard against every pore. She felt that she would go mad if he did not come. Once she took out the stiletto she had concealed in the bosom of her cloak, and looked at it. She had always carried it when among the beasts at the menagerie, but had never yet used it. It was virgin to her purpose.

Time passed. She felt ill; she became blind with pain. Presently the servant entered with a telegram. His master would not be back until the next morning.

Very well, she would return in the morning. She gave him money. He was not to say that she had called. In the Boulevard Montparnasse she took a cab. To the menagerie, she said to the driver. How strange it all looked: the Invalides, Notre Dame, the Tuileries Gardens, the Place de la Concorde! The innumerable lights were so near and yet so far: it was a kink of the brain, but she seemed withdrawn from them, not they from her. A woman passed with a

baby in her arms. What a pretty, sweet face it had! —the light from a kiosk fell on it as she passed. Why did it not have a pretty, delicate Breton cap? As she went on, that kept beating in her brain—why did not the child wear a dainty Breton cap—a white Breton cap? The face kept peeping from behind the lights —without the dainty Breton cap!

The menagerie at last. She dismissed the cab, went to a little door at the back of the building, and knocked. She was admitted. The care-taker exclaimed with pleasure. She wished to visit the animals? He would go with her; and he picked up a light. No, she would go alone. How were Hector and Balzac, and Antoinette? She took the keys. How cool and pleasant they were to the touch! The steel of the lantern too—how exquisitely soothing! He must lie down again: she would wake him as she came out. No, no, she would go alone.

She went to cage after cage. At last to that of the largest lions. There was a deep answering purr to her soft call. As she entered, she saw a heap moving in one corner—a lion lately bought. She spoke, and there was an angry growl. She wheeled to leave the cage, but her cloak caught the door, and it snapped shut.

Too late. A blow brought her to the ground.

She had made no cry, and now she lay so still!

The watchman had fallen asleep again. In the

early morning he remembered. The greyish golden dawn was creeping in, when he found her with two lions protecting, keeping guard over her, while another crouched snarling in a corner. There was no mark on her face. The point of the stiletto which she had carried in her cloak had pierced her when she fell.

In a hotel near the Arc de Triomphe Alice Wingfield read the news. It was she who tenderly prepared the body for burial, who telegraphed to Gaston at Audierne, getting a reply from Jacques that he was not yet back from London. The next day Andrée was found a quiet place in the cemetery at Montmartre.

In the evening Alice and her relative started for Audierne.

On board the *Fleur d'Orange* Gaston struggled with the problem. There was one thought ever coming. He shut it out at this point, and it crept in at that. He remembered when two men, old friends, discovered that one, unknowingly, had been living with the wife of the other. There was one too many —the situation was impossible. The men played a game of cards to see which should die. But they did not reckon with the other factor. It was the woman who died.

Was not his own situation far worse? With his

uncle living—but no, no, it was out of the question! Yet Ian Belward had been shameless, a sensualist, who had wrecked the girl's happiness and his. He himself had done a mad thing in the eyes of the world, but it was more mad than wicked. Had this happened in the North with another man, how easy would the problem have been solved!

Go to his uncle and tell him that he must remove himself for ever from the situation? Demand it, force it? Impossible—this was Europe.

They arrived at Douranenez. The diligence had gone. A fishing-boat was starting for Audierne. He decided to go by it. Breton fishermen are usually shy of storm to foolishness, and one or two of the crew urged the drunken skipper not to start, for there were signs of a south-west wind, too friendly to the Bay des Trépassés. The skipper was, however, cheerfully reckless, and growled down objection.

The boat came on with a sweet wind off the land for a time. Suddenly, when in the neighbourhood of Point du Raz, the wind drew ahead very squally, with rain in gusts out of the south-west. The skipper put the boat on the starboard tack, close-hauled and close-reefed the sails, keeping as near the wind as possible, with the hope of weathering the rocky point at the western extremity of the Bay des Trépassés. By that time there was a heavy sea running; night came on, and the weather grew very thick. They heard the

breakers presently, but they could not make out the Point. Old sailor as he was, and knowing as well as any man the perilous ground, the skipper lost his drunken head this time, and presently lost his way also in the dark and murk of the storm.

At eight o'clock she struck. She was thrown on her side, a heavy sea broke over her, and they were all washed off. No one raised a cry. They were busy fighting Death.

Gaston was a strong swimmer. It did not occur to him that perhaps this was the easiest way out of the maze. He had ever been a fighter. The seas tossed him here and there. He saw faces about him for an instant—shaggy wild Breton faces,—but they dropped away, he knew not where. The current kept driving him inshore. As in a dream, he could hear the breakers—the pumas on their treadmill of death. How long would it last? How long before he would be beaten upon that treadmill—fondled to death by those mad paws? Presently dreams came—kind, vague, distant dreams. His brain flew like a drunken dove to far points of the world and back again. A moment it rested. Andrée! He had made no provision for her, none at all. He must live, he must fight on for her, the homeless girl, his wife!

He fought on and on. No longer in the water, as it seemed to him. He had travelled very far. He heard the clash of sabres, the distant roar of cannon,

the beating of horses' hoofs—the thud-thud, tread-tread of an army. How reckless and wild it was! He stretched up his arm to strike—what was it? Something hard that bruised: then his whole body was dashed against the thing. He was back again, awake. With a last effort he drew himself up on a huge rock that stands lonely in the wash of the bay. Then he cried out, "Andrée!" and fell senseless—safe.

The storm went down. The cold, fast-travelling moon came out, saw the one living thing in that wild bay, and hurried on into the dark again; but came and went so till morning, playing hide-and-seek with the man and his Ararat.

Daylight saw him, wet, haggard, broken, looking out over the waste of shaken water. Upon the shore glared the stone of the vanished City of Ys in the warm sun, and the fierce pumas trod their grumbling way. Sea-gulls flew about the quiet set figure, in whose brooding eyes there were at once despair and salvation.

He was standing between two worlds. He had had his great crisis, and his wounded soul rested for a moment ere he ventured out upon the highways again. He knew not how it was, but there had passed into him the dignity of sorrow and the joy of deliverance at the same time. He saw life's responsibilities clearer, duties swam grandly before him. It was a large

dream, in which, for the time, he was not conscious of those troubles which, yesterday, had clenched his hands and knotted his forehead. He had come a step higher in the way of life, and into his spirit had flowed a new and sobered power. His heart was sore, but his mind was lifted up. The fatal wrangle of the pumas there below, the sound of it, would be in his ears for ever, but he had come above it; the searching vigour of the sun entered into his bones.

He knew that he was going back to England—to ample work and strong days, but he did not know that he was going—alone. He did not know that Andreé —was gone! that she had found her true place: in his undying memory.

So intent was he, that he did not see a boat making into the bay towards him.

THE END.

THE TRESPASSER

BY

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